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We Parted At the Altar

By Laura Jean Libbey.

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WE PARTED AT THE ALTAR.

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A Novel.

BY

LAURA JEAN LIBBEY,

Author of "A Mad Betrothal," "Ione," "Parted by Fate," "Floribel's Lover," etc., etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY WARREN B. DAVIS.

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WE PARTED AT THE ALTAR,

CHAPTER I.

"TO THE GRAND BALL."

"Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry."

HEN you read what I have written here, I shall be lying cold in death."

The words were written by the trembling white hand of a young girl, standing in her bridal robes alone, at midnight, in the vestry of an old, isolated church.

Continuing, she wrote rapidly on the leaf she had torn from the marriage register:

"Despite the shock, it will not matter much to you, although but a few moments since—only a few moments—you led me to the altar, and vowed there to love and cherish me—oh, cruel words! Oh, false vows!—when you know your heart was cold and bitter toward me.

"I am going to set you free, knowing I must part from you. I am young to die; but death is sweeter than life without you. Yes, at the very altar you shall have your freedom back again.

"Your poor, unhappy, loving DORIS."

Let us read the romance of the few brief days that led to the love of this ill-mated bride and groom; how they met, and what caused this hasty and most reckless of all reckless marriages; and why the young bride fled from her bridegroom at the very altar.

Only three days previous to the opening of our story, on a sunny June afternoon, the hands of the great clock on the wall of Madame Delmar's fashionable seminary at Beech grove, Maryland, are slowly creeping around to the closing hour of four, but it seems to the restless, bright-eyed seminary-girls that the closing hour will never roll around to-day.

The bell taps at last, lessons are over, and a moment later a bevy of young ladies come fluttering, laughing and chatting down the broad stone steps,

as only bright, romping, happy light-hearted schoolgirls—who know nothing of the cares of the world —can laugh and talk.

Among the group, yet quite apart from the rest, was a slight, fair young girl, differing from her companions by being far prettier. Her plain muslin dress, reduced almost to shabbiness, was sadly in contrast to their dainty, ruffled mulls; but you would lose sight of this in gazing at the exquisite, piquant beauty of the dimpled rosebud-face, framed in curled golden hair, and the large blue eyes—deeply, beautifully blue, like the heart of a velvet pansy; yet she was only Doris Brandon, madame's dependant ward.

Turning abruptly into a side path, Doris crossed the lawn with flying footsteps. Reaching a secluded spot at the lower end of the spacious grounds, she flung herself down on the daisy-studded grass, sobbing as though her heart would break.

Angry, defiant, rebellious tears they were, and surely no young girl ever had more bitter cause to weep.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she sobbed, dashing the great pearly dew-drops away with a slim white hand, "if my life were only like the life of other young girls! Oh, it was bitterly cruel of madame to taunt me with my dependence before the whole

school to-day! If I only had wings, like this brown linnet in the tree over my head, how quickly I would fly from this dreary prison. I am young, and life runs warm in my veins, fills my heart, beats in every pulse; yet how can I live without even one of those things that make life endurable? How much longer is this monotonous life to last, I wonder."

It was to end sooner than she knew; this very day was to be the turning point of her life, whether for weal or for woe, ah! who shall say?

She removed her hat, and the June sunshine fell unheeded on the graceful head crowned with tumbled, golden hair, that framed the flushed, pretty, tear-wet face.

A slight wind raised the hat from the grass, and bending forward quickly to recover it, she caught sight of her own face in the clear, babbling brook that flowed through the grounds and on to the glittering Chesapeake.

"Ah! if that face belonged to any one else it would be called very pretty. It is fairer than Vivian Courtney's and they rave about *her* beauty. Who could find anything to admire in a poor little nobody like me? I might as well have been ugly, for all the good my beauty does me," sighed Doris.

There was a time coming when that same face

was to be more brilliant, when crowds were to surround it and do homage to its loveliness. But it was never fairer than on this sunlit afternoon when Doris Brandon bent over the stream and moaned for the dreariness of her young life.

The far-off shriek of the incoming afternoon express startled her, and she sprang to her feet with a little cry.

"I had almost forgotten to go down to the south gate and watch for Vivian Courtney's beau, who is to come by that train, and deliver to him the letter she intrusted to me to give him."

Picking up her sun-hat, and hastily tying the blue ribbons under her dimpled chin, Doris rose quickly, and glancing furtively back at the grim seminary walls, sped away in the direction of the old south gate on her fateful errand.

At that moment the Southern express, which was twenty minutes late, steamed into the little station of Beech Grove, on the Chesapeake.

From the rear car sprang a handsome young man, who gazed about him quite doubtfully, a moment after the train steamed on.

He is a tall, handsome, well-dressed young fellow, dark as to hair and complexion, and thoroughly aristocratic, from the straw hat which is pushed rather carelessly back from his broad, white brow

to the toe of his polished boot, which he is tapping rather impatiently with his gold-mounted, ebony walking-stick.

"Ah! that must be the place," he says to himself, eying curiously a large stone building with many turrets and gables. "Yes, that *must* be Madame Delmar's seminary. Vivian said I couldn't possibly miss it."

And for the twentieth time that afternoon he drew from his breast pocket a dainty, perfumed, pink-tinted, monogramed letter, which was directed in a girlish hand to "MR. FREDERICK THORNTON, JR., care of Mr. G. Thornton, Esquire, Banker, No. —Wall street, New York."

He drew the dainty letter from the envelope, and looked carefully at the directions in the postscript again:

"Take the path to the right of the station, and it will lead you directly to the seminary, by way of the old south gate. I will be there waiting for you. Be sure you come in time for the grand ball. I have set my heart on going. It will be a wonderful affair. All the girls of the school are just wild over it, and can scarcely wait for Tuesday evening to roll around. I must close now, in order to watch my opportunity to smuggle this into the mail-bag and outwit madame, whose argus eyes are

ever on the alert to prevent billets-doux from leaving *her* establishment.

"Yours in great haste,

"VIVIAN COURTNEY."

"Pretty, willful Vivian," he mused, with a smile and a flush on his handsome face. "Before I leave Beech Grove, you will have to answer 'yes' or 'no' to a certain question that has been agitating my heart this many a day."

He walked quickly up the daisy-bordered path, thinking of the bright, girlish eyes that would be watching for him from one of the dormitory windows.

Turning an abrupt curve in the path, he came suddenly in sight of the white, arched gate of the seminary grounds; and standing beneath the tall arch, under the waving plumes of a lilac tree, was a picture he never forgot while his life lasted—a picture that would have startled any young man who was a beauty-worshiper; and with the sight, all thoughts of Vivian flew from his mind.

At the first rapid glance he had beheld a slim young girl in a blue dotted muslin dress, a bewitchingly pretty face, half shaded by a broad straw hat, and waving, golden hair, a small, red, smiling mouth, and a pair of wonderful blue eyes.

He approached, raising his straw hat with a low bow.

"I expected to see Miss Courtney here," he said, rather confusedly for this debonair, worldly young man. "I—"

"I am here in Vivian Courtney's place, or rather, to deliver a letter to you from her, if you are Mr. Frederick Thornton, and I suppose you are," she interrupted eagerly.

He smiled amusedly, and bowed, and she drew from the folds of her pocket a tiny little note which she placed in his hands.

She was just turning to leave him, when he said, eagerly:

"Please don't go yet. This may require an answer."

So Doris waited patiently by the gate, stealing shy glances now and then from under her long, curling lashes at the face of the handsome young stranger as he perused her schoolmate's note.

Doris Brandon had never seen such a handsome young man before. The French masters and the music professors of the seminary were cross and very ugly. The doctor and the rector, who came occasionally, were both old, and the few young men in the village that lay over the hill were very common-place sort of persons, indeed. No wonder this

smiling, handsome young man quite captivated Doris's girlish fancy at first sight.

The note which Vivian had written contained but a few tear-blotted words, and was as follows:

"DEAR FREDERICK:—Father has come quite unexpectedly, and I am to go home with him, he says. We have barely time to reach the train. Oh, how disappointed you will be when you come. I am, oh, so sorry. Fate seems against us. What a pity it is to miss the ball, too, after I had set my heart on going. I hope I shall not lose all that I set my heart on. I shall have to get some one of the school-girls to meet you and deliver this to you. I don't know who yet.

"Yours, in the greatest kind of a hurry,

"VIVIAN."

"P. S.—Come back to town by the next return train."

"There is no answer," said Mr. Thornton, smiling, and adding imploringly: "But won't you sit down on this log for a moment, and tell me, please, how it was that Vivian left the seminary so hastily, and what she said to you when she intrusted you with this note."

Blushing prettily, and thinking it would be quite ill-mannered to refuse him, Doris sat down.

"Vivian's father came quite unexpectedly for

her," she said, quite unconscious that she was repeating the words of the note, and that he knew all about it already, "and just as she was going down the steps with her father she thrust two notes into my hand; one was to me and read:

"'Give the other note to a young man who is to come on the afternoon train and be at the old south gate at four o'clock this afternoon. Watch sharp for him, and don't let madame see or know. Of course I know it's a little bit wrong to deceive madame, but oh, it's so romantic, you know.'"

Frederick Thornton smiled again as he stood leaning carelessly against the trunk of a tree, watching her.

"What a sweet, guileless little creature she is," he thought.

At that moment a sharp, rasping voice broke harshly on the summer air, calling loudly:

"Doris! Doris Brandon, where are you? I want you!"

It was droll to see how the birds flew out of their nests, gave a terrified whirl back again, singing loudly to each other, as though they would say:

"Look! look! Here in our green, shady paradise is an angry woman!"

Doris sprang from her mossy seat in alarm.

A VISION OF GIRLISH LOVELINESS.—*See Chapter V.*

"It is Madame Delmar," she cried, in affright. "How angry she would be with me if she found me loitering here."

With a little nod of her curly head, she would have sprung down the shady path, but Frederick Thornton put out his white hand detainingly. A sudden impulse came to him to see this fair young girl again, and that was the beginning of the fatal end.

"Will you come here to-morrow afternoon at this time for a note to deliver to Vivian when she returns to school?" he asked, earnestly.

"Yes," she promised, hastily, and in an instant she was lost to sight among the trees.

"Doris Brandon. Ah, what a pretty name, and what a pretty young girl. But somehow, she does not look quite happy," he mused, as he turned away with something very like a sigh.

Doris eluded madame by taking another path to the seminary. Her little heart was in a strange whirl and a dark smiling face seemed to dance between her and the sunlight. Poor child! She would have had a happy enough life of it if her path had never been crossed by this handsome young man.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOVERS.

Frederick Thornton paced up and down the lane before the old south gate, quite half an hour the next afternoon before Doris made her appearance.

"I was afraid you had quite forgotten your promise to come here to-day, Doris. You will pardon me for calling you that; it sounds so much sweeter than to say Miss Brandon," he added.

"I should hardly know how to answer to the name of Miss Brandon," she said, thoughtfully. "You are the first person who ever addressed me so; every one calls me Doris; I like it best. As to my coming late, madame was very cross with me to-day. I could not get away before."

Ah, how sorry he looked.

"I heard over at the village that the present term at the seminary closed yesterday afternoon, and most of the young ladies had returned to their respective homes. I feared you had gone after I had seen you," he said; "and as to the note, it was useless to write it in that case."

"You thought I was a pupil here?" she asked, laughing softly, while the color came and went in her pretty, dimpled cheeks.

"Yes, I thought so," he answered. "Is it not so?"

"Oh, dear no," she answered, with a merry, girlish laugh. "I am only Madame Delmar's ward. I have lived here always."

"Always?" he repeated, wonderingly.

She nodded her curly head.

He was a stranger in that locality or he would not have asked that question. Every one in the village knew Doris's history—how, seventeen years before, a stranger, heavily veiled, had been seen making her way in the dusky twilight through the village streets, pausing now and then to ask a stray pedestrian which road led to "the young ladies' seminary." Each one that she spoke to noticed that she carried a heavy, dark basket, and that her voice was low and tremulous. The next morning the strange dark basket was found on the steps of the seminary, but the veiled woman had disappeared.

When the basket was brought to Madame Delmar and she opened it, she threw up her hands with a gasp of horror and dismay.

"There's—a—a—*baby* in it!" she cried, in consternation.

A note was found pinned to the baby's breast; it contained only a few words, in delicate chirography, which read as follows:

"In the name of humanity do not turn this foundling from your roof. Give her the name that she must bear—Doris Brandon."

Simply these words—no more.

Madame fretted and fumed, but ended by keeping the child. Although she grew up a singularly pretty girl, madame could never quite overcome her great prejudice against her, and she quite believed the girl was born for her especial annoyance—to be her especial cross. Madame was strict, grim and hard with her. She had too many tasks set for her to loiter among her companions, and her dresses were always so shabby, being made from those cast off by madame, that she was rather glad than otherwise to escape the gaze and close scrutiny of the seminary girls as much as possible.

Doris never knew how it happened, but as they stood there under the waving lilac blooms, with one question leading to another, she had told this handsome stranger all of her simple history—a history so dark and so unutterably dreary for such a fair young girl, he thought, pityingly, as he looked at pretty, shy Doris.

"And when vacations roll around—then the place

is closed up, all save the western wing—it is indeed like a prison," she sighed. "Yes, yesterday was the last day of the term; every one has gone, and life will be very lonely for me," and the red lips quivered.

"I shall be staying a few days longer in the village," he said. "Do you think Miss Delmar would permit me to call upon you?"

Doris drew back with a merry laugh.

"You do not know madame," she said, laughingly. "I would not *dare* mention your name to her, she has such a terrible aversion to men. She often says if she were dying, her last solemn request to me would be, 'never to look with anything save hatred upon the face of men.' So, you see, I would not *dare* introduce you to her; she would forbid me to speak to you."

"You would not like that?" asked Frederick, gently.

"No," confessed Doris, hot blushes dyeing her pretty, dimpled face.

"Nor should I," he exclaimed, energetically. "If she were to imprison you, keep you under lock and key because of it, I should be your Prince Charming. I would find some way to rescue you from your dreary prison. Would you like to see me

again?" he asked, abruptly. "Would you care for it?"

Poor, pretty, shy Doris! She looked for one half moment into the depths of those dark, splendid eyes, then her own fell, and again a crimson flush suffused her face. He took her hands in his.

"If you will only say that you care for it, I will manage in some way. Do you care?" he persisted.

"I—I—shouldn't mind," she faltered, shyly.

"You tell me you have never had one pleasure in all your young life," he went on, earnestly. "That is so sorrowful. Now, I have a plan in my mind that would give you a great treat."

She clasped her little hands together and gazed at him breathlessly.

"You have heard of the great ball that is to take place at Langdon villa to-morrow, Tuesday, night? Young Langdon was a college chum of mine. I can arrange it so that you can go, if you like."

"*I*—could—go—to—the grand ball?" she gasped in dismay.

"Yes," he said, gayly, "but you would have to manage it by strategy. If I were to ask madame to permit you to go, you are sure she would refuse; so why ask her? It grieves me to hear you say you have had not one pleasure in your young life," he said kindly. "The lights and the music would be a

brilliant treat for you. I would not ask you to go, if I believed there could be the least possible harm in it; it seems so cruel to deprive you of so much gayety. If you are brave enough to slip out of the grounds and meet me here, we will go to the ball, and I will bring you home any time you say."

Let it be thoroughly understood, dear reader, that no other thought save the one desire to give this beautiful, lonely girl a bright evening of happiness prompted him to make this impulsive offer. Frederick Thornton was a young man of the strictest honor.

He was gay and careless—a beauty-worshiper, but no one ever yet attributed to him a dishonorable action. He reverenced all women for the sake of his mother and fair sisters. No broken hearts had been laid at his door. Our readers will bear this in mind when they read what followed.

It was such a novel, dazzling idea—the very thought of going to the grand ball—that it quite overcame Doris with intense childish delight.

"Could I get back before half-past ten, do you think?" she asked, breathlessly. "Madame closes the house and the gates at that time."

"Certainly," he responded, promptly; "you see, this being a village, the affair commences at nine, instead of eleven. We could be there by nine and

stay until ten, and it would not take us more than ten minutes to reach the seminary, don't you see?"

"Yes," she answered, raising her great, childish, pansy-blue eyes to his face; then suddenly they fell in great perplexity. "I do not know what kind of dresses young girls wear to balls," she said, with childish simplicity. "Oh, I couldn't go; I have nothing fit to wear."

"You could wear the white dress you have on," he declared; "the best dressed young girls are always the simplest dressed and plainest."

"Oh," she cried, with pretty confusion, "surely girls don't wear anything like *this?*"

"Indeed they do," he persisted; he lost sight of the fact that the plain muslin dress, which looked very pretty in the red glow of the sunset, and with that background of bright-hued roses and green leaves, would look sadly *outré* when brought in contrast with the sheen of satins and costly robes.

The élite of the whole country would be present at this ball.

"If you are quite sure of that, and sure it wouldn't be wrong, I—I think I would like to go—oh, ever so much," she faltered.

And so, these thoughtless young people—she, a child of seventeen, and he, only a boyish young

fellow of four-and-twenty—settled the matter, and they lived to rue it while their lives lasted.

At length the eventful Tuesday evening drew near. Oh, how eagerly Doris watched for the sun to set, the dusk to creep up, and the golden-hearted stars to come out.

Nine o'clock struck from an adjacent belfry as Doris crept out of the seminary. The coast was quite clear; there was not an obstacle to overcome. Still the girl's heart beat high with excitement; it was a terrible, almost an awful thing to do, yet she liked the excitement and enjoyed the danger, as the young and thoughtless always do.

Madame Delmar, usually so grim and stern in all things, gave the girl her full freedom to roam in the moonlight where fancy willed—about the picturesque grounds that surrounded the old gray-stone seminary, and in this she committed a great error.

"The birds and the flowers cannot put nonsense into the girl's romantic head," she would tell herself, grimly. Her peace of mind would have taken flight at once, if she had but dreamed that among the fragrant roses there lurked a young and handsome man.

Standing on an upper veranda in the shadow of one of the tall pillars, she saw the slight form flit across the grounds in the moonlight.

"I shall call her in presently," thought madame. Then for the next half-hour she quite forgot about Doris.

In making his way toward the old south gate the thought occurred to Frederick whether or not his dark-eyed Vivian would quite approve of this little romantic escapade when she heard of it, or not. But surely she could not quite find it in her heart because he—her lover—had stepped out of his way to give a lonely girl a few hours of pleasure.

He was certainly Vivian's lover. He had not declared himself in so many words; still, that had been only a question of time as to when he should. He might take a fancy to a pretty face for a day—but his heart always went back faithfully to Vivian.

If fate had not taken Vivian away from the seminary so suddenly, there would certainly have been a formal engagement between them. The diamond betrothal ring he had bought to place on her little white hand still lay in his vest pocket.

Vivian was not there to go to the ball, so what harm was there in taking poor, pretty little Doris, to whom it would be such a treat? If Vivian were displeased about this—Vivian, who was one day to be his bride—it would be his last escapade with any other girl, he promised himself.

CHAPTER III.

MARRYING IN HASTE.

When Doris entered the grand ball-room she caught her breath with a cry of delight.

"Oh, Mr. Frederick!" she gasped, clutching at his arm with her little, trembling white hands, "it seems like fairyland—or—a—a glimpse of heaven!"

Frederick Thornton laughed amusedly; to him there was nothing out of the common in the banks of roses, the palms and waving ferns, the dazzling chandeliers, and the unique and brilliant costumes of bewitchingly pretty maidens and *passé* matrons.

"A young girl's first ball does seem like a glimpse of fairy life," he answered, gayly. "Those that follow never seem quite so nice."

"I shall always remember you when I think of my first ball," she answered, impulsively. "And, indeed, I am quite sure it will be my last and only one. No one will ever take me to a ball again."

"Do not be so sure of that, Doris," he replied, in a low voice. "What are you thinking of that you

gaze so intently at that bank of roses?" he asked, curiously.

"I was thinking what a pity it was to cut them from the stem and bring them here, for just a few hours. By to-morrow they will all lie withered and dead against that wall."

"What a waste of pity!" he laughed. "They will have served their purpose well—gladdened the eye, delighted the sense. But come; the band is about to strike up a waltz. I hope you have learned to waltz, Doris."

The hour that followed seemed like a dream to poor, pretty little Doris. She could have danced on amid the lights and the music forever and forever. And in the excitement, the revelry, the brilliancy, can it be wondered that time seemed fairly to take wings and whirl away? Doris had been very much abashed at first to see that she was, as usual, the poorest dressed girl in the gay throng; but in the excitement of the lights and music, and in the exuberance of happy youth, she soon forgot it, and was enjoying herself as she had never enjoyed herself before.

The eyes of the gentlemen followed her admiringly, and the ladies, in consequence, were exceedingly jealous and envious.

"Who is she?" they asked of each other. But nobody seemed to know.

In all her simpleness and plainness, as is often the case, even amidst that throng of beauties, Doris was acknowledged the belle of the grand ball.

Mrs. Langdon, the hostess, gazed at the pretty young girl in wonder, and at last she sought her son.

"Max," she said, leading him aside, "who is that young girl? How came she here? Who invited her?"

"I did, mother," he responded, promptly. "She is one of the seminary girls. Miss Doris Brandon is her name, I believe. You remember we sent a card to Miss Courtney. She could not attend. And my old chum there, Frederick Thornton, asked me to send a card to her, and, of course, I complied. Are you displeased, mother?"

"No," she answered. "Still, I should have been better pleased had I been consulted first. The girl is pretty, I grant you; but she does not look quite at home in our set, and you know how particular I am in that regard."

"She may be a little awkward," laughed the son. "School-girls have the reputation for being so. She must be our equal socially—some millionaire's daughter—or Thornton would not be paying so

much attention to her. He never takes a step backward in the social scale, you know."

Mrs. Langdon looked relieved. On returning to the ball-room she observed that young Mr. Thornton and the pretty belle of the ball had disappeared.

As we have said, time flew by on golden wings.

Neither Doris nor Frederick noted the fleeting moments.

Over and over again Doris told herself how happy she was as she looked into Frederick Thornton's handsome face with glad, shining eyes. In those blissful moments, a woman's heritage of love had come to her, and more than once that evening the thought occurred that her life would be doubly dark and dreary when he left the village. She dared not think of the cold, dark hours when she should see him no more. And like the faint echo of a dream, the words of the poet recurred to her:

> "Perchance if we had never met
> I had been spared this vain regret;
> And yet I could not bear the pain
> Of never seeing thee again."

Yes, Doris had learned to love him—love him with all the deep, romantic passion of her girlish heart.

With youth, love is not a plant of slow growth,

The glance of an eye, the touch of a hand, a smile, a tender word, often lights the flame of a deathless love.

In striving to be kind to Doris, to make this ball a happy, memorable epoch in her girlish life, Frederick Thornton had unwittingly opened her eyes to the truth. She was deeply in love with him.

But, girl-like, she would have died rather than he should guess her sweet secret.

Suddenly he paused abruptly, in the midst of a waltz.

"I am afraid it is almost time to go, Doris," he said, hurriedly taking out his watch and glancing at it.

Great Heaven! was he mad or dreaming? It wanted exactly eight minutes to half-past ten—the time for closing the seminary gates.

"Doris," he said, gently.

She turned a startled face toward him.

"Oh, Mr. Frederick, what is it? Why do you look like that? What is the matter?"

"We must go at once, Doris," he said. "We have not a moment to lose. We have not seven minutes left to reach the seminary. It wants just that time to half-past ten."

He never forgot the deadly, awful despair that

came over her face—the ghastly pallor—how the blue eyes darkened with awful fear.

"Oh, Mr. Frederick!" she gasped. "What shall I do?"

"Courage, Doris," he said. "We can make it if you are quick in getting your wraps."

A moment more and they were out in the starlight together, fairly flying down the white road. He could barely keep pace with the girl's fleet footsteps.

She was out of breath as they reached the steep path that led up the rugged hillside to the seminary, and was obliged to take his arm.

More and more deadly grew her fear as moment after moment slipped by.

Frederick Thornton could hear the quick beating of the girl's heart and the piteous sighs that shook her slender frame.

"Doris, are you crying?" he suddenly asked, in deep distress.

Before she could reply, from a church tower near them the hour of eleven rang out, slow, solemn strokes, each one a death-knell to Doris.

She fell down on her knees in the path, unable to move a step further, sobbing as he had never heard any one sob in his life before. Ah! the pity of it! His watch was half an hour late.

He could see the great, heavy iron gate from where he stood. *The gate was closed.*

"Oh, Mr. Frederick! Mr. Frederick! what shall I do?" moaned Doris. "Madame will never let me enter her door again. Oh, I am lost! lost! lost! I am homeless, penniless! I will be thrown on the world's mercy, with nowhere to go! It was my only refuge, and now I have lost it! Oh, if I could but die!"

Frederick Thornton stood before the kneeling little figure like one petrified.

"I will take all the blame upon myself, Doris," he said, huskily, "for assuredly the fault was mine in coaxing you to go. Come, cheer up. All will be well. Come, let us walk boldly up to the gate and ring the bell."

Doris drew back in terror too great for words.

"It would make matters no better. You do not know madame. She will never let me enter her door again. Oh, I wish I were dead!"

"I meant that you should have such a happy time in going to the ball," he said, gently. "I am so sorry it has ended so."

She bowed her beautiful golden head until it touched the cold stones.

"Where can I go? What shall I do, Mr. Frederick?" she sobbed. "I am so young and friendless!

Oh, I wish indeed that I had died when I was so happy amidst the lights and the music, dancing with you at the ball!"

She was clinging to him like a terrified child, sobbing piteously now. He was quite at a loss what to say to comfort her.

"Are you quite sure it will be as bad as you say, Doris?" he asked, hoarsely. "Are you *sure* she will turn you from her door for this?"

"Oh, yes, yes," sobbed Doris. "I am as sure of it as though it had already happened."

As she speaks a strange thought flits through his brain—a thought that twenty-four hours ago he would have scouted.

"Oh, what shall I do, Mr. Frederick?" she moaned. "I am so young—I—I am *afraid* of the great, cold, cruel world."

"You shall not face the cruel world, Doris," he said, huskily. "I am a gentleman. I cannot leave you in distress brought on by myself. There is but one way out of the difficulty, and that is this: I must marry you."

"Marry me!" she echoes, her little hands dropping from her tear-stained eyes, and gazing at him aghast.

"Do you see any other way out of it?" he asks, repressing a groan that rose to his lips. "I con-

fess that I do not, under the circumstances. I must make the only atonement possible. I must make you my wife, if you are willing. It is the only reparation within my power. Will you accept it, poor little Doris?"

She looked up at him wistfully.

"Do you really want me to marry you?" she asked, shyly and wonderingly.

"I suppose that would be the only proper thing," he remarked, hopelessly.

"But do people ever marry each other who have only been acquainted such a short while as we have been—not quite a week?"

"Sometimes," he answered, abstractedly.

"How strange it is that you should really want to marry *me*," she mused. "I don't see what for. But, really, I don't mind if—if you want me so very much."

Want her! He could have laughed aloud at the very idea. He did *not* want her. He was *forced*, as it were, into making her his wife. He could have cursed his folly, as he stood there, that had led him into the fatal error that had persuaded her into going to that ball.

He aroused himself from his bitter thoughts by a great effort.

"It may as well be now, Doris," he said, with

reckless despair. "No doubt we can find somebody to perform the ceremony at once."

She was romantic and impressible. Ah! how nice it would be to have a handsome young husband like Frederick Thornton to love and protect her. There would be no bitter scoldings and harsh, grim Madame Delmar; no more heartaches because she was alone in the great, cold world. She had led such a lonely life; her poor heart had always craved love so much.

She never forgot that ride through the sweet, pink clover to the stone church that stood on the cliff overlooking the glittering Chesapeake. How the night-birds twittered, and the crickets chirped, and the fireflies twinkled like earth-stars in the green grass by the roadside.

She had a dim recollection of the few moments that were spent in the old rector's parlor, and of how the rector's daughter had loaned her her own wedding veil to wear, and of Frederick leading her up the dim aisle of the church—up to the altar—his face grave almost to sternness, and pale as death.

Oh! how weird it all seemed to Doris. Then, as if in a dream, she stood quite still by his side while the fatal ceremony went on. She heard the questions and responses, and answered the questions put to

her; and the white-haired minister pronounced her his lawful wedded wife.

The bridegroom bent down his handsome head to kiss his bride; he knew it was customary, it was expected of him. Doris drew back with a startled cry, for his lips were as cold as ice.

Poor little bride! It was done. In a moment she had sown the seeds from which was to spring up a harvest of woe so terrible that her wildest imagination could never have painted it.

"Are you glad to have married me, Mr. Frederick?" she whispered, timidly, as they turned from the dim old altar towards the vestry to sign the register.

"Glad!" he groaned, under his breath.

But low as the words were muttered, her strained ear caught them, and every word shocked her, and stabbed her heart like the thrust of a dagger.

"Glad! You have wrecked my life. You have parted me forever from Vivian, whom I loved so madly. I have given you my name. I will care for you, because in the eyes of the world you are my wife; but here at the altar we part. I pray Heaven I may never look on your face again."

She did not faint. She did not cry out, or utter any moan.

All in a moment her young heart seemed turned to stone.

When the names were all signed in the register, Doris turned piteously to her bridegroom :

"I have one prayer to make," she said. "All—*even you*, Frederick—leave me alone in the vestry for a brief half hour. Do not refuse me. You will come here alone to me then, Frederick, my husband."

It was a strange, unheard-of request. He bowed wonderingly, and left her, and the door closed after him, shutting him out from her view.

"He married me and he does not love me!" she moaned, wildly, as she sank down shivering on her knees. "I have wrecked his life, for I have parted him from Vivian. That is what he said. Oh, I heard it. But it is not too late to repair what I have done," she panted, as the low dash of the waves caught her ear. "I can set him free at the very altar. I can, and I will. If I have to part from him, I had better die."

And this brings us back, dear reader, to the pitiful scene that opens this story.

CHAPTER IV.

REPENTING AT LEISURE.

The clock in the church tower struck the midnight hour in slow, measured strokes, and Doris struggled up from her knees with a wild, panting cry, sobbing out:

"When he returns he must not find me here."

Then in her bridal robes, without one backward glance, she stole from the vestry out into the cold, moonlit night.

The terrible revelation, as they turned away from the very altar, that her bridegroom had not married her for *love*, had almost turned poor Doris's brain; and her one mad thought was to set him free again, by seeking rest in the dark, cold water, and end it all.

Hurrying down the path, without one glance behind at the dimly-lighted old church, and the coach with the restless white horses standing before its door, she reached the brink of the bay, tipped by the golden, arrowy light of the stars. The tide was

coming in. The water was rising higher and higher each moment, with the wavering moon-track across it. It would soon reach the rock where she stood, and sweep her away.

"No one cares what becomes of me," sobbed Doris, piteously. "What have I done that I should be so miserable and friendless? Life would have been so different if Frederick could only have loved me. Oh, it is so cruel, cruel! Heaven forgive me!" she cried. "I am so lonely, so desolate!"

"Doris!"

The sound of her own name startled her so she would have fallen backward from the rock on which she was standing, down into the seething water below, if a strong arm had not been put out hurriedly and caught her; and, turning her white, terrified face, Doris found herself confronted by Frederick Thornton.

"Doris!" he repeated, in amazement, "what are you doing here? You requested me to leave you half an hour by yourself in the vestry. I came down to the bay to while away the time. How is it I find you here?"

As he spoke he looked keenly, curiously into the fair, young face, which was flushing and paling so piteously.

He was quick to notice the great change in her—

how she shrank from his outstretched hand, and how her eyes drooped before his steady gaze.

In a flash it occurred to Doris that he had not been to the vestry, and he had not read the note she had left there addressed to him. So *he did not know* what had brought her to the dark, restless waters of the bay; and, standing face to face with him, she could not tell him.

"This is the height of imprudence, little Doris," he said, taking her hand, and drawing it through his arm. "Surely, Doris, you do not repent our hasty marriage, do you?" he asked suddenly; and he was greatly troubled and dismayed to see her nod her curly head and burst into tears.

"What is done cannot be undone, Doris," he said, gravely. "There is nothing for it now but to make the best of it. I will tell you my plans for the future when we get into the coach. Put on your wraps quickly. We must catch the 1:20 train, and we have quite a long ride before us."

He had spoken so gently, so kindly to her, a great, throbbing hope suddenly sprang to life in Doris's heart. He had married her without love; but perhaps, in the time to come, she *might* win that love, if she did not part from him at the very altar.

She had written that fatal letter on the impulse of

the moment, and now, on the impulse of the moment, she hurried to the vestry again, caught it up and destroyed it.

Five minutes later they were in the coach, whirling rapidly away to catch the Baltimore express. Doris stole many a shy glance at the stern, pale, handsome face beside her by the light of the carriage lamp.

Evidently he had forgotten that he said he had much to say to her, for they reached the depot without his having spoken a word.

Doris watched the handsome face with wistful eyes, too timid to break in upon his thoughts.

They took their places in the palace coach, but the train had gone some little distance before Frederick Thornton turned to Doris, or even seemed to remember her presence.

"I never remember to have found time pass so slowly in my life," he said, impatiently.

There was no answer, and he turned quickly toward his little bride, wondering at her silence, her gravity. Her face was quite pale; her lips were white and pressed firmly together; and there were tears shining on the long, curling lashes. In her heart was a sense of desolation words cannot describe. When the train stopped at different stations people wondered at the beautiful, white, girlish face,

so young, so lovely, and yet so sad, that looked from the window so wistfully.

Like all young girls, Doris had had rosy day-dreams of what her wedding-day would be like, and of the lover who would clasp her in his arms when they left the altar, murmuring: "My darling, my own now, my wife." Ah, how different was the reality—terribly different!

She looked at Frederick Thornton sitting beside her so cold, haughty and stern. Ah, how handsome he was; how strange it seemed to her that this handsome man was—her husband; her husband who had married her within the hour, yet whose heart was as far from her as the earth from the sky. Her lips quivered, her eyes grew dim with tears; the sadness, the pathos of that face, might have touched a heart of stone. He either did not or would not see it. He was looking impatiently past her—out of the window. The impulse was strong to turn to him and sob out:

"My husband, love me a little; I am young, I am lonely and desolate; love me a little. Hold my hands in yours; we are going out in the great, cruel world that I have always dreaded so much. Say something to comfort me."

Then she hesitated. What if he should look at her contemptuously or turn haughtily away? No,

she must not speak to him; she must not sue for the affection withheld from her; she had pride enough for that.

"You do not ask where we are going, Doris," he said at last. "Have you no curiosity to know?"

"I have been waiting for you to tell me," she answered, simply.

"I intend taking you to my home, where my mother and sisters are, but you could not go—like *that*. We will stop over in Baltimore long enough to purchase a suitable wardrobe for you."

He never forgot the startled eyes she raised to his face, eyes shining with tears.

"Home—where your mother and your sisters are!" she repeated in alarm.

"Why not, Doris?" he asked. "You do not seem to favor the idea."

"They would not like me; they would *hate* me!" she cried, vehemently. "They would see at once that I have not been used to anything, and that you are far, oh, so far above me. I should be awkward and ill at ease before them; I should not know what to do, what to say, or how to say it. I, who have been a poor, little, dependent nobody all my life, know nothing of your world and its ways, and you would be ashamed of me. You would repent

marrying me, and I should die," she moaned, under her breath.

"My mother and sisters are by no means formidable persons," he said, frowning slightly. "They are well-bred, a trifle haughty perhaps (all save one of them), dainty and refined. They are ladies whom it will be a pleasure for you to meet."

"Tell me more of them," said Doris, faintly, her courage sinking lower and lower at every word he uttered. Oh! how she dreaded to meet his relatives!

"I will begin with my mother," he said, "and sketch really faithful portraits for you: She has more pride and dignity, we think, than any other member of the family. She is tall and stately; her eyes are clear, cold and gray. She is the very embodiment of the term, a well-bred, haughty lady."

"And your sisters—are they like your mother?" faltered Doris, still more faintly.

"I have three sisters," he responded. "Isabel, the eldest, is very like mother in face and manner; Gwendolin is called the blonde beauty of the family, and Beatrix, or Trixy, as we always call her—well, I can hardly find words to tell you what she is like. She is, I must confess, a great cross to my dignified mother. She is sixteen, and the romp, the tomboy, the mischievous sprite of the family.

She has very expressive eyes, brown and sparkling, but she can never be what is called good-looking, for her hair is positively red. My father is a stately gentleman, bound up in his business cares. What I am you can see for yourself. I think I have given you a fair picture of the inmates of Thornton Villa, as our home is called."

As Doris listened the presentiment grew stronger and stronger that every one in this stately home would be antagonistic to herself.

"And your mother being what she is, so haughty and proud, wished you to marry some one like herself, no doubt," said Doris, in a low voice.

"Yes," replied Frederick Thornton, huskily. "My mother wished me to marry Vivian Courtney," and he uttered a deep sigh.

Doris crept closer to him, looking breathlessly up into his face with her great, blue, shining eyes.

"Tell me—if it had not been for me—for taking me to the fatal ball, which ended so fatefully—tell me, would you have married Vivian?"

He was too honorable and straightforward to deceive her. He bowed his head.

"It would have been so, Doris," he answered, huskily.

"You loved her so well," she whispered below

her breath, her face growing paler and paler; but he did not notice that.

"Yes," he replied, but added, hastily: "why talk of that now? It is all over between Vivian and me."

"I have come between you and the girl you loved," breathed Doris.

"Let me forget it if I can," he cried out sharply. "Don't torture me by reminding me of what might have been."

Then he relapsed into silence again, and his face, half averted from her, grew sterner, colder and prouder than ever. He did not notice how wistful was the fair young face turned to him. He was ill at ease; he had found the wedding journey decidedly irksome; he longed to be away from her; and thus two hours dragged wearily by, and the palace coach, with its ill-mated bride and groom, whirled on through the darkness.

She clinched her little hand; she tried to still the beating of her heart. He was solicitous for her comfort, he was attentive to her wants, but she noticed after that allusion which awakened his remembrance of Vivian, his lost love, that he spoke to her only when civility dictated that he should speak; and when he did address her he never looked at her.

From her heart she longed to be back with

Madame Delmar again. Ah! was ever a bride so lonely before? Did any young girl ever meet such a strange fate as this? Sitting there by her young husband's side, so cruelly, bitterly unhappy, on her wedding journey, the words of an old poem came to her, filling her eyes with tears:

"Like some divided river,
Your ways and mine will be,
To drift apart forever—
Forever till the sea."

CHAPTER V.

THE DESERTED BRIDE.

When they reached Baltimore they drove straight to the hotel, and then, for the first time, it seemed to Doris, her husband spoke kindly to her. He said:

"You look very tired. I should advise you to get some rest. I always find a cigar and the morning air most refreshing after a journey. We stay here a week," he went on, as he placed a roll of bills in her hand. "That will give you plenty of time to make your necessary purchases."

Doris looked at him the picture of dismay, but

she did not tell him she did not have the faintest notion as to what was appropriate to buy.

"Do you wish me to accompany you on this shopping expedition?" he asked. "To tell you the truth, it always bores me. I have ordered the coupé at two, to-morrow afternoon."

"I can go alone," answered Doris, bravely. "And I will buy what I think will please you."

He smiled, gratified at her ready complaisance. Half an hour later she stood alone in her pretty blue-and-gold boudoir attached to the suite of rooms that had been assigned them.

Too restless to sleep, Doris passed the long hours which followed sitting at the window, gazing at the throng of pedestrians that passed to and fro across the way.

The afternoon commenced to wane, the sun set, and darkness enfolded the city. Still Doris sat by the window, patiently watching for Frederick Thornton's return. How little she dreamed of the suns that would rise and set ere she looked upon his face again!

Soon after a servant announced six o'clock dinner.

"I shall not go down until my husband comes," said Doris, timidly. "He must be here shortly."

The long evening wore away; eleven o'clock sounded from an adjacent belfry; and weary with

long watching, Doris' curly head drooped slowly, and, sitting in her chair by the window, she fell into a troubled sleep.

The sun was shining into the room when Doris opened her eyes the next morning. For an instant she gazed around her with a startled cry of dismay. Where was she? Then, like a flash, the strange events of the last few hours recurred to her.

The poor little bride gazed around her with a chill feeling of loneliness. Where was her handsome young husband? Why did he neglect her so cruelly? she wondered, vaguely.

Another forenoon dragged its slow length by. Still Frederick Thornton seemed to ignore her presence completely.

Doris was glad when the coupé he had ordered came for her. She was not used to shopping, yet it was marvelous to see the good taste she showed in the selection of a handsome, stylish traveling dress and one or two other costumes.

They were ordered to the hotel at once, and counting out the contents of her purse, Doris found she had a little over twenty dollars left.

Arriving at the hotel again, Doris proceeded at once to array herself in one of her prettiest costumes, that she might look more pleasing in the

eyes of her handsome young husband when he should return.

It was a beautiful vision of girlish loveliness the long French mirror reflected—a slender, graceful little creature, in bronze surah silk, from which the white throat and delicate head rose like a flower; but, ah! it was such a very wistful face the golden curls framed, and the pansy-blue eyes were heavy with unshed tears.

"Ah, will he never, *never* come?" she cried out in vague terror, clutching her little hands over her heart, and pacing restlessly up and down the floor.

A dozen times she had stretched her hand out towards the bell rope. She *must* send some one in search of him. Perhaps that was what he was waiting for.

Poor, innocent little Doris! She knew so little of life and the great, cruel world.

In answer to her summons and to her query, "If he would be so kind as to find her husband, Mr. Thornton, and tell him she wished to see him?" the man gazed with undisguised pity into her sweet, young face.

"The gentleman who brought you here is not stopping here, ma'am," he said, constrainedly. "He left that same morning, after depositing for a week's board, as that is our rule when there's no baggage."

"He left the hotel—the day—we—came? Left me—alone—here?" gasped Doris, in an agony of dismay words are weak to describe. "Surely you are jesting. He would not, he could not be so cruel. We were only married two days ago."

"Are you strong enough to bear a great shock?" asked the man, almost hating himself for the words he was about to speak.

Once before in his varied experience of hotel life he had been obliged to speak the same words to a fair young wife, and, without a moan, without a cry, she had thrown up her white hands and fallen dead at his feet.

Doris rose slowly to her feet, and stood before him with cheeks pale as a snowdrop and eyes wildly dilated.

"You—you have something to tell me!" she gasped. "In the name of mercy, I implore you to speak quickly. A shock, you say? I—I can bear it."

"A woman could break this more gently to her," muttered the man, drawing his sleeve across his eyes.

"Oh, why don't you speak?" implored Doris. "Is there anything the matter with my—my—husband?"

"I hope what you say is true—that that soft-spoken, fine gentleman married you, poor lass. But,

be that as it may, the truth, if you must have it, is: He has deserted you."

"Ah, I knew it would be so!" she exclaimed, in alarm.

With a wild, bitter, agonizing cry, Doris fell, face downward, upon the floor like one dead.

Deserted! A deserted bride! Those were the words that broke a human heart.

We must hasten to explain, dear reader, the strange stroke of fate which tore these two asunder. Arrest your judgment of our handsome hero until you have heard his defence.

True, he did not love this young bride whom he had been fairly forced by an unkind fate into wedding, and he left the hotel crying out silently to himself that she had wrecked his life, and made the thought of the future as bitter as death; still, for all that, it would never have occurred to him to desert her. He was too honorable to even contemplate such an action.

Deeply engrossed in his own thoughts, he walked rapidly down the crowded thoroughfare, paying little heed to what was transpiring around him. Suddenly he heard a great shout, a great cry from the people about him.

He had barely time to raise his head, and in an instant he comprehended; but he was too late to

save himself. A horse, dashing over the crossing, had taken fright at a painted balloon in the hand of a little child. In a flash the driver was hurled from his seat; the maddened animal wheeled about with one wild plunge, and ere Frederick Thornton could take one backward step a great iron hoof was planted just above his temple.

More dead than alive he was taken to the nearest hospital. He had sustained a terrible fracture of the skull, the consulting doctor found. His life hung by a single thread. If he lived, his reason might be partially restored—never wholly, unless by a violent shock which might cost him his life, and it might be many a long day before he would waken to a realization of what was transpiring about him.

As is often the case, this was one of the many accidents in which city life abounds, which never found its way into the daily papers.

"So young, so handsome and stalwart," said the hospital nurse, pityingly, as she bent over the pillow. "I will kiss him for the mother whose pride he must be, and whose heart will be broken to see him like this—and for the sweetheart, too, who may be watching in vain for his coming."

By a letter found in his pocket it was ascertained he was the son of Banker Thornton, of New York

City, and his father was accordingly communicated without delay.

We will pass briefly over the fortnight of terrible suspense and anxiety which followed. Night and day his father watched by his bedside, refusing to be comforted. And when at last it was concluded that the son could be removed with safety the banker bowed his head, uttering a fervent "Thank God!"

Owing to Frederick's strong constitution his convalescence was more rapid than the doctors had anticipated; but with returning consciousness it was discovered there was a strange blank in his mind. He could not remember how he happened to be in Baltimore, what had brought him there, or even the cause of the accident which befel him.

He remembered quite well receiving Vivian Courtney's pink tinted note which had called him that sunny afternoon to Beech Grove. He remembered alighting from the train, and had a dim recollection of inquiring the way to Madame Delmars' seminary; but beyond this—Heaven help him!—*he remembered nothing.*

The events that had followed in rapid succession —his meeting with beautiful Doris Brandon—the ball, and the fatal marriage which had resulted from it—were entirely obliterated from his mind.

Alas! for the strange complications of a fate more cruel than death!—*the very existence of the fair young bride*, who waited in vain for his coming, *was swept entirely from his memory.*

There was great rejoicing at Thornton Villa when the banker and his son returned home. Mrs. Thornton and the young ladies embraced Frederick by turns. His mother held him in her arms longest.

"There is some one else waiting to welcome you, dear," she whispered, nodding toward the bay window, heavily draped with silken curtains—"some one who would not have cared to live if you had died."

"Is it Vivian, mother?" he asked, quickly, his handsome face flushing with pleasure.

"Yes," she answered, with a smile; and in another moment the impetuous young man had crossed the room and had flung back the heavy curtains.

A slim, girlish figure bounded up from the velvet arm-chair, murmuring:

"Frederick! oh, Frederick!"

"Vivian, my love! my darling!" he answered, extending his arms joyfully.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATAL BETROTHAL.

"Will you not welcome me, Vivian?" he exclaimed, eagerly. "One word from *you* will go nearer my heart than whole volumes of warmest greeting any one else could speak."

"You *know* how glad I am to see you, Frederick," she replied, in a low voice, disengaging herself from his clinging arms. "My conscience smote me as I looked at you, and noted the paleness and great change in you; for I realize that I am the cause of your accident. But for the foolish note I wrote you to come on and go to the ball you would never have taken that horrid trip to Beech Grove. I shall regret it all my life."

"Think no more about it, Vivian," he exclaimed, persistently detaining the little white hand in his clasp. "The pleasure of being with you again, and to hear you say you have missed me, amply atones for it all."

"How strange it is that you should have completely lost all remembrance of what transpired

from the moment you stepped off the train at Beech Grove," mused Vivian. "I wonder if the note was delivered to you which I left with one of the girls."

"I wish I could answer you, Vivian, but, alas! I cannot. It is of slight consequence, however, now that it is past, and I am with you once again," he answered, lightly. "But, tell me, Vivian," he went on in a lower tone, "are you still of the same opinion that I must not ask your father for you yet? You are cruel to me, Vivian; how can I wait?"

"What are we to do, Frederick?" she answered, raising her great, dark velvety eyes to his eager face. "Both papa and mamma declare I am by far too young to give one thought to love or lovers."

"You do not think so, Vivian?" he asked, quickly.

"No," she confessed, shyly, adding, laughingly: "It is rather a difficult position—that of an only child. If my father and mother had five or six daughters, they would not think so much of me."

"No wonder your parents look askance at your lovers, Vivian. No, they do not want to part with you. They treat our love for each other lightly, declaring you are only a child of seventeen, and that it is simply ridiculous asking the hand of a schoolgirl in marriage. Still I do not despair, Vivian. I am sure all will come out right in the end. When they see, despite all our trials and rebuffs, we

are true and steadfast to each other, they *must* be touched—they *must* be pleased—and consent to give you to me. Heaven intended us for each other, Vivian; have I not loved you all my life?"

"Yes," she assented, eagerly, "from childhood, Frederick."

"And I will love you, and only you, Vivian, until the day I die," he whispered, covering the little white hand he held with passionate kisses. "If I could not win you, life would never hold one hour's happiness for me."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of his sister, Trixy, and he had barely time to add:

"I am determined to plead my cause again with your parents—this very day, Vivian. Hope for me —pray for me."

"Ah, here you are, Fred!" cried a merry voice, roguish and piquant, yet sweet as a silver bell. "I guessed that I should find you here, because this is Vivian's retreat. Wherever *she* is, *you* are sure to be. We have long since dubbed you 'Vivy's shadow.'"

And, long before the sentence was finished, two white arms were flung about his neck with such a hearty hug it almost took his breath away.

"Trixy!" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton, entering the

room just in time to overhear this remark, "you must not tease your brother and Vivian!"

"Then he must not be holding Vivy's hand and looking supremely ridiculous when I come upon them suddenly!" she cried, with a rollicking laugh and a saucy toss of her head, as she sprang through the low French window out on the rose-bordered terrace.

"You must not mind her, Vivian, dear," said Gwendolin Thornton, hastily crossing the room. "If she finds out that anything she says plagues you, the little torment will keep it up."

Vivian blushed. She did not look very unhappy over the matter, nor did her handsome stalwart companion. They had been bantered about each other ever since they were children, and were, as a consequence, quite used to it by this time.

"I want you both to come to the library and settle a very important decision," continued Gwendolin.

"We intend to commemorate Frederick's home-coming by some festivity. Balls are old; lawn fêtes not much better. Shall we have an archery party, a yachting party, a carnival, or charades on a platform built on the lawn, and dancing afterward?"

"Let us have nothing with dancing connected with it," interposed Frederick, quickly. "I have

taken such a strong aversion to it. I cannot tell why."

"Nonsense!" laughed Gwendolin. "Any evening gathering loses half its charm if there's no dancing. Why, it would be outrageously dull. No, no! There must be dancing, at all events."

"Then I will leave you to arrange the matter between yourselves," declared Frederick, turning away and sauntering out on the porch.

Presently his mother joined him.

"Do you notice how pale Vivian has grown?" she asked, keenly watching her son's handsome, indolent face. "Worrying over your illness did that, Frederick."

"Dear little Vivian," he murmured, gazing dreamily off toward the white sails skimming up and down the river.

"The dream of my life would be realized if I could see you safely married to her, my boy,' his mother went on, gently. "Forgive me, but I often entertain strange doubts and fears over your future. Falling in love with every pretty face that crosses your path seems to be your rock ahead, Frederick, and—"

"Mother," he interrupted, reproachfully, "I cannot help being what you have often quaintly phrased it—a beauty worshiper; but I could never care for

any one as I care for Vivian. I mean to act upon your advice at once—marry Vivian as soon as I can gain her parents' consent."

Mrs. Thornton's face brightened.

"I was much afraid you had some other love-affair on hand," she said, in a low voice. "You know you are heir to a million; many people know that, and unscrupulous young women might set traps for you. You are romantic by nature, easily influenced and persuaded. I have always had a strange presentiment over your future. It will be the happiest day of my life when I see Vivian your bride."

"And that you shall see as soon as I can win her consent," he replied, gallantly, raising his hat.

Long after his mother had left him, Frederick Thornton continued to pace slowly up and down the porch, thoughtfully blowing the rings of cigar smoke away from his handsome face.

"How strange it is! Ever since my illness I have been haunted by some indefinable, vague sensation, as though there was something important on my mind, which has escaped my memory, and which I am ever vainly trying to recall," he muttered.

He always attributed it to some vanished fancy during his illness, and at length he ceased troubling

himself about this vague fancy, which was no doubt the idle coinage of a delirious brain.

Ah, Heaven pity him! How little he dreamed that it was the memory of his bride, from whom fate had parted him so strangely, that he was ever vainly endeavoring to recall.

There was more than one difficulty in his wooing. A pretty, willful, defiant little beauty like Vivian was sure to have plenty of lovers. One of her admirers, more bold than the rest, openly declared himself the bitter rival of any man who should sue for lovely Vivian's hand. Thus, for some time past, Frederick Thornton and Gerald Marston had been rivals—bitter foes; and when at length Vivian's engagement to Frederick Thornton was announced, it was a terrible blow to at least one heart.

Gerald Marston sat with the newspaper clutched tightly in his hands, gazing with a death-white face at the printed paragraph. Slowly and deliberately he read the closing lines through for the twentieth time:

"The marriage will take place on the tenth of September, at the residence of the bride's parents."

Then he tore the paper into a thousand fragments, and set his heel upon them, while the bitterest laugh that was ever heard fell from his lips.

"If I had been the son of a millionaire, instead of

a poor devil of an artist, old Colonel Courtney and his haughty wife would have looked upon me with more favor. They have persuaded Vivian into this. There was a time when I could have sworn she loved me best."

His face grew haggard and stern, and the light died from his eyes.

"I have staked my life, my love, my hope, on a girl's heart, and I have lost," he cried, despairingly.

He flung his brush from him, and the paintings that had been the dearest dreams of his ambition he dashed from him with a shaking hand.

"Good-bye, life, love and fame," he muttered, catching his breath hard.

"If my darling is happy with Thornton, God knows I will try to bear up like a man. I cannot stay here to witness my rival's triumph. I will go away. I will put the whole width of the world between us."

The next day Vivian Courtney received the following letter:

"DEAR LITTLE VIVIAN—Dear to me still, although I have lost you—and with you vanish all the bright dreams of a happy future—I am going away. I leave the city to-day to be gone long years, perhaps forever. I shall never return until I can look calmly upon you as another man's wife. If I can never do

this, I will never return. Even though I do not, always remember this, Vivian—that one lives somewhere in the great, wide world who would lay down his life for you. I shall seek forgetfulness on sandy deserts, on burning plains, in dark forests, on trackless seas.

"You gave me a simple geranium at the garden gate one moonlit night. No doubt it was a thoughtless act, and one which, even in that moment, you forgot. But I—oh, Vivian!—I have treasured that simple leaf as a miser treasures his gold. Countless kisses and burning tears have fallen upon it, because once it rested in your dear hands. When I die, that geranium leaf will be found upon my heart. Good-bye, and God bless you, peerless Vivian.

"I leave for Baltimore on the noon train. Farewell, my beautiful, whom I have lost.

"Yours in life and in death.

"GERALD."

CHAPTER VII.

DRIVEN OUT INTO THE WORLD.

When Doris opened her eyes she found herself lying upon her white couch and the kindly face of the old housekeeper bending over her.

"Where am I? What is the matter?" she exclaimed, struggling up to a sitting posture and

pushing back the heavy mass of golden curls from her face with her little white hand; but in a flash memory returned to her, and she remembered all; and a bitter cry echoed through the room as she fell back on her pillow, turning her face to the wall.

"My poor child, you must not take on like this," said the housekeeper, pityingly. "You will force yourself into brain fever."

"I wish I could!" cried Doris, bitterly. "Would to Heaven I could die and end it all. Oh, yes, yes, I wish I had fallen dead in my wedding clothes at his feet—at the altar."

"My poor child," said the housekeeper, soothingly, "that is a horrible prayer to fall from the lips of one so young. Be brave and strong; look your trouble in the face calmly, and pray God for strength to bear it. You are not the first young wife who has been cruelly abandoned by the man she loved and trusted—the man who, at the altar, vowed to love, cherish and protect her while life lasted."

"I loved him so!" moaned Doris. "Oh, Heaven help me to bear it, or I must die. Where shall I turn, where shall I go?"

"I would advise you to go back to your mother," said the housekeeper. "She could comfort you best."

"I have no mother," sobbed Doris. "I am alone in the great, cruel world."

"You must have friends," said the housekeeper.

Doris shook her golden head.

"Not one on earth," she sobbed.

The good housekeeper looked at the fair young girl in wonder.

No friend!—not one on the wide earth! It was almost incredible.

"Are you *sure* the marriage you believe in so fully was a *legal* one?" asked Mrs. Lane, in perplexity. "A man who deserts a young girl deliberately in this fashion is capable of any villainy."

Doris raised her great, childish blue eyes to her face.

"I am sure it was legal," she answered. "I remember he was very particular that it should be so. Oh, how can I think he has willfully, deliberately deserted me! Some day he will return here for me. I feel sure of it; I feel it in my heart. I cannot live without him, any more than the flowers could live without the sunshine. Oh, he *must* return to me!"

How the next day passed Doris could never remember. It seemed as though the torture of a lifetime was crowded into it. Then it suddenly dawned upon her she must leave the hotel. She

could not remain there forever. There was but one place she knew of to go to, and that was—back to Madame Delmar's seminary.

Ah, what a desolate ride back it was to Beech Grove! The train whirled past beautiful stretches of country, thrifty villages and peaceful homes, but Doris looked out of the windows without seeing. It was dusk when the train stopped at the station.

For an hour or more a terrible storm had been raging, but Doris stepped from the train and made her way up the steep path, all unmindful of the bitter storm.

Her wedding-ring fell from her finger in the long grass by the wayside, but she did not heed its loss.

Stealing in through the great arched gate-way, she made her way around to the western wing of the building. This had been set apart for Madame Delmar's use during vacation.

The crimson hangings were looped back, and a bright flood of light shone out through the darkness like a beacon light. Noiselessly Doris approached the window and peered into the room. Ah, what a contrast to the cheerfulness within was the driving, pitiless storm without. Drawing the rose vines aside, Doris pressed her white face still closer to the pane.

At the table, engaged on some trifling fancy work,

sat Madame Delmar, and near her stood her brother John, a plain, sturdy farmer, whom madame was always particular to ignore in public.

John's farm adjoined the seminary grounds on the left, and the awkward bachelor brother made his home in the western wing of the seminary; but few of madame's dainty, aristocratic pupils ever knew this, or even dreamed of the existence of such a person.

On this particular evening madame and her brother John were discussing Doris's sudden disappearance of a few days before. Ah, how plainly every word was heard by the little figure crouching out there in the pitiful storm!

"I always thought no good would come of Doris roaming round like a wild gypsy for hours at a time," declared madame, stitching vigorously at her embroidery. "And now she has run away at last. I have always said no good ever comes of taking in waifs left on one's doorstep. She always wanted to play the fine lady. Doris Brandon was too romantic. Too much love-dreaming and nonsense go with these pretty faces."

"I can't think where the child could possibly have gone, Cynthy," interposed honest John, dejectedly. "I always thought we were doing our clear duty by little Doris in providing her such a

good home. I never dreamed she was unhappy here. I miss the child so!"

"Don't make an old fool of yourself, John Delmar!" exclaimed his sister, energetically. (She never wasted any of the little elegancies of speech or grammar upon plain, honest John.) "It was that miserable girl's own fault if she was not happy here. She was always too fond of decking herself out in finery, to look nicer than my pupils, and they rich men's daughters, every one of 'em. And as to missing her, the Lord knows I am glad to be rid of her!" she added with spiteful emphasis.

A twig snapped beneath the window, and—was it only their fancy?—a white face, framed in tangled, golden, wet hair, peered wistfully into the room from among the climbing red roses. A moment later a shadow crept across the threshold, and a voice, faltering piteously, sobbed out brokenly:

"Oh, madame! I have come back to you! Oh, pity and forgive! If you scold me I shall fall down and die at your feet!"

"It's Doris's spirit!" gasped madame, in terror. "Look at that tangled hair and white, horrible face!"

"I am no spirit, madame!" sobbed Doris, advancing toward the centre of the room, near where the

horror-stricken woman stood. "I'm your unhappy ward, Doris!"

"So you are really Doris in the flesh!" retorted the irate madame, her rising anger taking the place of her momentary fright. "Where have you been for the last two days? I want to know where you have been, I say. Your dress is bedraggled with mud. We would be disgraced for life if any one hereabouts saw you. I ask you again, Doris Brandon, what's the meaning of all this?"

"I—I cannot tell you, madame!" sighed Doris, bitterly. "Only be kind to me and forget that I ever went away."

"Do you hear that miserable girl? Do you hear her, John?" cried madame, furiously exasperated. "This is the creature you would waste your pity on! She slips off in the night, Heaven only knows where, and I dragging the bay and scouring the whole country for her; and now, after two days, she comes coolly back, and asks me to forget the disgrace she has brought on us, and, most of all, insults us by telling us not to ask where she has been. I never struck the girl in my life yet, but I declare I can scarcely restrain myself from beating the truth out of her. I shall investigate this matter thoroughly; depend upon that, ungrateful girl."

"You may kill me, if you choose, madame,"

sighed poor Doris, with a gasping, tearless sob, as she sank down on the floor in a little, dark heap, "but I will not—oh, I cannot reveal to you the dark secret of the past two days."

"Is there a lover at the bottom of it?" cried madame, shrilly, fairly shrieking the words in the girl's startled ear. "Answer me! Has love anything to do with this disgraceful affair?"

"No. No one loves me," muttered Doris, faintly. "My poor heart is bruised so sorely. Oh, no, no; God never intended any one to love me!" she added, wearily.

"You cannot deceive me. There's a lover at the bottom of it," declared madame, suspiciously. "It's just such pink and white baby faces as yours that make all the mischief in the world. You cannot remain under this roof till you make a clean breast of it."

The beautiful, young golden head was bent low before her.

Doris turned her great blue eyes piteously to honest John Delmar, who stood by, regarding the scene in dazed, dumbfounded helplessness.

"Forgive me, oh, won't you, please, and take me back!" sobbed Doris, distractedly, holding out her little white hands toward him. "You have been kind to me all my life. Don't desert me now, for I have

no one but you to look to. If *you* turn from me I shall surely die."

"It would be the best thing you could do," returned madame, curtly. "You may as well go back where you have been for the past two days if you persist in refusing to confide in me."

"Do be merciful and forgive me," cried the poor, tortured child. "I have nowhere to go, madame. God has shut me entirely out from His mercy, and forgotten me, too!"

"Well, that's just what I intend to do," cried madame, heartlessly and mercilessly, fiercely grasping Doris by the shoulder, and forcing her to her feet. "I want you to leave this house the same way you came. Go where you've been the past two days," she repeated, tauntingly; "and if you have one spark of decency or pride left, you will keep out of the neighbors' sight, or there will be worse stories afloat than there are now. For the last time I say, clear this mystery up straightway, or go."

"Oh, how can I tell her? How dare I tell her," thought Doris, wildly, "that I am a victim to love's cruel curse—that he whom I wedded and trusted so blindly, deceived me more cruelly than death; cast me adrift on the great ocean of life, without the least pity for my youth, my innocent, broken heart, or my blasted hopes!

"Surely, you don't mean to drive me from the shelter of your roof out into the bitter storm, madame?" gasped Doris. "Surely, you cannot mean it," she cried, a death-like chill creeping over her.

"I *do* mean it!" cried madame, sharply. "Go—without delay!"

"Now, Cynthy, sister, don't be too hard upon poor little Doris," interposed John Delmar, in an unsteady voice. "You've gone far enough. You must remember, Cynthy, little Doris is only a young, thoughtless child. I do not believe she's done anything wrong. Have you, child?" he asked, with intense earnestness.

Doris tried to answer, but the words died away on her white lips, making no sound; and she gazed at him with a world of pitiful entreaty in her childish, blue eyes, like a hunted deer suddenly brought to bay.

"There!" cried madame, shrilly and triumphantly. "Don't you see she dare not deny it? I say again, you waste your pity."

John Delmar, poor Doris's only friend, turned away, sick at heart, and abruptly left the room, to hide the great tears that were welling down his honest face.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT IN THE DARKNESS.

With a bitter cry, Doris sank on her knees at madame's feet, her beautiful, tangled, golden hair falling in reckless abandon about her like a golden veil, her lovely young face white with fear.

Poor child! She might have known better by past experience than to appeal to John Delmar, when his sister "laid down the law," as she called it.

"It is night now, madame. You will at least let me stay under the shelter of your roof until morning. Listen to the terrific storm, hear how it thunders, and see the blinding lightning. Oh, madame, I am so afraid of the darkness and the terrible storm. In the morning I will go quietly away, and you shall never look upon my face again; and I shall always remember that you did not drive me out into the fury of the bitter night."

Madame's cutting, sarcastic laugh answered her.

"Afraid of the storm and the darkness!" she

sneered, maliciously. "You were not afraid to steal out of the house at night, and remain out of it for two consecutive nights. You did not care whether you disgraced me or not."

"I never meant to disgrace you," sighed Doris, humbly.

"Depend upon it, you shall not have the opportunity of disgracing me any more," replied Madame Delmar, grimly. "Go!" she cried, pointing to the door. "And never let me look upon that pink-and-white baby face of yours again. If you persist in staying around here, I shall have you arrested, and then you will be forced by the law to clear up this mystery. The secret as to where you have been will be wrung from your lips, whether you are willing or no."

Madame Delmar never forgot the wild startled cry that broke from Doris's lips.

"Madame," she sobbed, struggling up from her knees, and turning to the woman who had shown her so little mercy in the hour of her bitterest need, "you have not been kind. You have driven me forth into the cold, bitter world to live or to die as God sees fit; but I forgive you. Some day you may regret this action. When any one mentions the name of Doris, the unhappy waif fate thrust upon your hands, and who has been unwittingly

such a cross to you, it is my prayer that you will always try to think of me kindly and at my best."

Without another word, Doris turned and fled out into the darkness of the night. In the distance she could hear the plaintive murmur of the waves as they beat drearily against the shore.

"I wish I had flung myself into the dark water when I intended to, that night, when those fatal words bound me to him—his wedded wife.

"His wife! Oh, dear Heaven!" she cried, bitterly, struggling on through the terrible storm and the darkness. "May God forgive him for the falsehood that stained his lips!"

She flung herself down in all the storm, and hid her white, despairing face in the long, daisy-studded grass, weeping for the overthrow of her hope and her love, and the desolate young life that lay in ruins around her, as she had never wept before.

The rain, like angel's tears, fell pityingly down upon that golden head buried among the silent daisies; but Doris did not even heed it.

She stretched out her white hands through the darkness, crying out to her lost love. Life was too hard to bear without him.

But such a passionate burst of grief is the soonest over. She did not cry out for Heaven to wreak its vengeance on this handsome young husband, who

had deserted her at the altar, as it were, as many another might have done.

"I will learn to forget him," she cried, raising her white face to the dark sky. "I will cast him out of my poor, shattered heart, as he cast me out of his, without one regret. Oh, the madness, the folly of trusting too blindly to love!"

Was it fancy, or did some one call her name? Doris raised her head from the long, wet, daisy-studded grass and listened.

Was some one calling her name, or was it only the wind sighing among the branches of the trees overhead, or perhaps some night bird's cry?

She sprang to her feet, listening intently. It was no delusion; footsteps were hurriedly approaching, and she heard John Delmar's voice calling:

"Doris—little Doris—are you here?"

"I am here," she answered; and a moment more he was standing beside her.

It had been all so sudden, so unexpected, the whole affair was over, and Doris was gone, before John Delmar fairly realized what had occurred.

"Come back, little Doris," he cried, in a voice husky with emotion. "I will be responsible to Cynthy. Thank God you are here, when it comes to that! I have as much right on these premises as she has. She shall not turn you away."

Doris shrank back from his outstretched hand.

"I shall never enter your door, Mr. Delmar," she sobbed, piteously—"no, never again."

All his entreaties proved unavailing; no inducement would prevail upon Doris to enter the house from whence she had been so rudely and cruelly repulsed.

"But what will you do, child? Where will you go?" asked John Delmar, in the greatest perplexity.

"I don't know," sobbed Doris—"unless you shall tell me some place."

"What had come over pretty, defiant, willful little Doris?" thought John, in sheer astonishment. "Was this crouching, timid little creature the romping, mischievous, dimpled face of pretty Doris, who but one short week ago had been the very sunshine of the old seminary, despite madame's crossness?"

"Tell me where I can go, Mr. Delmar," she pleaded. "I cannot—oh! I cannot remain here! You have always been kind to me; be kind to me now, and tell me where I can go."

"Do you really mean it, child?" he asked, slowly.

"Yes," she sobbed. "I want to go where no one who has ever known me can look upon my face."

A sudden thought flitted through John Delmar's brain.

"Perhaps, after all, it would be best for little Doris to go away somewhere until Cynthy's wrath had time to cool," he thought.

"If you are in earnest, and wish to go away for a spell, I think I can manage it," he said, slowly.

Doris seized his hand, covering it with passionate, grateful kisses.

"There is a family in New York—the Granvilles—who would receive you into their household for a month or so, if I were to request it. Do you think you would like that? You are not used to the ways of city life, child. Mrs. Granville would be kind to you."

"It does not matter much where I go; one place is the same as another to me," answered Doris, drearily.

How little John Delmar thought, as he went back to the house and penned that fatal letter, that that one incident was the turning point of poor, hapless Doris's eventful young life. He wrote it with a smile on his lips, little dreaming of the terrible consequences that would accrue from it.

He took her down to the depot, and purchased her ticket. The train was just starting, and with a hasty "Good-by," little Doris drifted out of his life forever, and on to her fate.

"Have I done right in sending the child to New

York?" he pondered, as he stood on the platform of the little station in the down-pouring rain and watched the train out of sight, as the bright light disappeared in the impenetrable darkness. "New York is a great, cruel, wicked city. I almost wish I had sent Doris to some quiet little village hereabouts. Somehow I have a vague, troubled sensation about it. I should have taken time to consider the matter well. I do not know that I have ever done anything like this on the impulse of the moment before. I hope Doris will write as soon as she reaches there."

Carefully placing John Delmar's letter of introduction in her pocket, Doris leaned back in her seat, giving herself up to her own thoughts. Wedded and cruelly deserted in the space of one short week, was ever a young girl's fate more pitiful? And yet, for all this, Doris could not quite hate the handsome young husband she had met and married so romantically.

The sun was high in the heavens when the train steamed into the Grand Central depot. The confusion, the stir, the rush of the great throngs of people confused Doris wonderfully.

"It is worse than Baltimore," she thought, in alarm.

"Cab! carriage! hack!" cried a dozen voices, as

many cabmen closed in around the timid, shrinking little figure, and Doris was almost thrust into the nearest vehicle.

A short ride brought her to her destination, No. — West 32nd street. Timidly ascending the brown stone steps, Doris rang the bell, and a servant soon appeared in answer to the summons.

"If you please, I should like to see Mrs. Granville. I bring a letter from Mr. John Delmar, of Beech Grove. Tell her—"

"Mrs. Granville!" repeated the man. "Why, that's the name of the family that used to live here. They moved away—left the city over a year ago."

"Gone!" echoed Doris, turning deadly pale. "Gone! did you say?"

"Yes," replied the man, impatiently, "that's what I said, Miss."

A deadly faintness seized Doris; she stood in the marble vestibule dazed, bewildered by this terrible stroke of fate. Where was she to go? What was she to do? She turned and walked down the steps clutching her little hands tightly over her heart.

Alone, friendless, and with less than a dollar in her purse, in the streets of New York! Ah, what should she do? That was the piteous prayer that fell from her white lips, as she moved on down the street.

"New York!" she murmured, with a sudden start. "It is here his parents live. How strange it is that I could have forgotten that, even for one moment." Should she go to his mother—the cold, proud, haughty lady he had described, and tell her all? Oh, no, no—a thousand times No! She would rejoice that her son had left her; she would find no pity, no mercy there.

She had scarcely proceeded a dozen rods ere she saw a phaeton, drawn by two mettlesome ponies, rapidly approaching her. One fleeting glance at the young girl reclining among the cushions, and she recognized her at once. It was Vivian Courtney, dashing, piquant, dazzling Vivian, in pink mull—her dark beauty enhanced by the crimson, lace-edged umbrella she carried, and the coquettish pink plumes which waved from her dainty straw hat that rested on her dark curls.

Little Doris's glance lingered but a moment on Vivian's proud face, then turned to the gentleman handling the reins. Every drop of blood seemed suddenly to leave her heart. The very air seemed to stifle her, and the light of the sun to grow dark around her; the gentleman was Frederick Thornton—*her husband!*

His dark, handsome face was bent eagerly toward his companion, with a rapt look of love and

admiration in his passionate, eloquent eyes that made poor little Doris almost faint to witness it lavished upon another.

CHAPTER IX.

A FINE LOOKING COUPLE.

Doris, almost fainting from excitement, stood fairly rooted to the pavement while the phaeton whirled past.

A lady and gentleman walking directly in front of her turned and looked admiringly after the natty equipage and its handsome occupants.

"A remarkably fine-looking couple," she heard the gentleman remark. And in answer to the lady's question if he knew them he replied: "There are very few New Yorkers who do not. She is the daughter of a wealthy gentleman who lives somewhere in the suburbs. She's only a school-girl as yet. Home just now on a vacation from boarding-school, I understand. Her companion is Banker Thornton's son. I had it from his own lips yesterday that the rumor floating about is perfectly true. He is soon to marry Miss Courtney."

Without pausing to hear another word, Doris

turned like one who had been dealt a sudden death-blow, and fled precipitately down the street. There was a small park at the end of it, which she entered, and flinging herself down on one of the benches, sobbed as though her heart would break. Then she dashed the pearly tear-drops from her blue eyes, and laughed aloud, and the sound of that wild laughter startled her.

"He is soon to marry Miss Courtney! That is what the gentleman said!" she cried, putting the shining hair back from her flushed, tear-stained face. "For one little minute I almost believed it. It is utterly impossible, absurd! Why, he *could not* marry her, for he is married to *me*. No one else could claim him. No one else has a right by his side."

She wondered if she should have called out to him. All her pride rose up and answered, "No!"

"What do other wives do when their husbands forsake them?" she muttered, below her breath. "I have heard of such things, but I never quite believed a husband who took the trouble to marry a young girl would heartlessly, deliberately desert her. I never dreamed that would be my fate. I never thought what those wives did. Oh! if I had a mother to go to—a sister to sympathize with me.

It is more bitter than death to be all alone in the cold, cruel world."

Sitting there, listening to the falling, splashing water of the fountain, the thought occurred to her again as to what she should do—where she should go. She could not sit in the park much longer—already the policeman patroling the grounds was commencing to eye her sharply. She might walk through the crowded streets until night set in—but where could she go after that? She was quite too dazed to think. Slowly she arose and moved toward the entrance gate.

For long hours Doris paced the streets of New York until the dusk began to gather and the great electric lights were lighted. At length the strength of her limbs seemed to fail her; glancing up, she found herself standing before the entrance of the same park in which she had sat that morning.

She tried to reach the bench by the fountain. She took one step within the enclosure; then, with a little faint cry, she threw up her hands and fell, face downward, on the gravel walk in a dead faint.

In a moment the same policeman who had watched her so furtively that morning hurried to her side.

"Poor child," he muttered, "so young and so fair. I am sure she is a stranger in New York. It

would be a deed of mercy to take her home with me and let Ellen attend to her." And without further ado Doris was conveyed across the way to the patrolman's humble home.

When Doris opened her eyes she found herself lying on a chintz-covered settee, and a kind, motherly face bending over her, and the look of puzzled wonder deepened in Doris's pansy blue eyes.

"You fainted, my dear, at the park gate, and my husband brought you here," explained the little woman. "You have been here all night. Your friends will be greatly worried over you, I fear."

"Friends!" repeated Doris, drearily. "I have no friends here; not one."

"Where are you stopping?" asked the patrolman's wife, gently.

"I am a stranger in the city; I just came here," answered Doris.

"Did you come to New York to find work, poor child?" asked the woman.

Doris raised her eyes to the plain, kindly face.

"I—I have had a great trouble," she said—"so great that it has blotted everything else out of my mind. I quite forgot to think out the great problem of life—what I am to do."

"Poor child," sighed the woman, "you have had

a great trouble, and you so young. You can't be much over seventeen, I'm sure."

"Just a few months past," said Doris, wearily.

"I have a daughter, my dear, so much like you, fair of face, with shining golden hair. She has married and gone away out West, far away from us, and you touch my heart because you are like her."

"Married!" repeated Doris, bitterly. "If you loved her why did you let her marry?—"

The patrolman's wife laughed a cheerful little laugh.

"Why did she marry, my dear? Why, because she loved her husband. Heaven intended them for each other, or they would not have wed."

"Does Heaven always intend the two who marry for each other?" asked Doris, breathlessly.

"To be sure, my dear," replied the woman, wondering at the question.

"But supposing, by any chance, people find out they have made a mistake in marriage—that they have married the wrong person—what do they do then?"

"Do, my dear?" replied the good woman in wonder. "How do you mean?"

"How do they remedy the mistake?" Doris asked. "Do many men desert their wives?"

"Oh, dear, no," was the quick reply. "Once married, married forever. There is no help for such a mistake. If people are dissatisfied after marriage they rarely complain. They sensibly make the best of it."

Doris turned her white face to the wall.

"Oh, my God!" she thought, in the bitterness of her own thoughts, "I cannot understand the problem of my own life. If he meant to marry me, why did he desert me?" That was the burden of her passionate cry.

Doris drank the cup of tea that was brought her, but she could take no food.

"I am sorry," she said; "you are very kind to me, but I cannot eat. Let me thank you before I go."

"Are you going out to try to find work, my dear?" asked the good woman, wistfully.

"Yes," said Doris, bravely.

"Then I should advise you to buy a thick veil for yourself the first thing you did. I say it only in kindness. Beauty like yours is a dangerous and fatal gift often to a young girl. You will remember my words when you are older. They will come back to you many a time through life. I would advise you to get a veil at once to hide such a face as that from the gaze of men. A pretty face

often brings misery when its owner is unprotected and innocent, as you appear to be."

A few minutes later Doris was out on the crowded street again.

At the first notion store she passed Doris went in to purchase a veil. A gentleman, tall, dark and handsome, stood at the counter, looking over an assortment of kid gloves. He glanced up as Doris entered, and the glove he held dropped to the show-case.

"What an exquisite face!" he muttered, glancing furtively at the lovely face, fair and dainty as a flower, crowned in its sheen of curling golden hair, the great, childish, pansy-blue eyes, and the lovely rosebud mouth.

"I would like to look at some veiling," said Doris, timidly approaching the counter.

"We do not keep veiling here," responded the dapper young clerk, mentally wondering why young girls with such pretty faces could be induced to wear a veil at any price. "You'll probably get what you want at Kellogg & King's."

"I do not know where that is," said Doris. "I—I—am a stranger. I have just come to New York."

As she spoke, as though attracted by a magnet, Doris glanced up, and encountered the fixed gaze of a pair of burning dark eyes.

Blushing crimson, she knew not why, Doris dropped the sweeping lashes over her eyes, turned hurriedly, and left the store.

"No doubt she has come to New York to look for work," said the clerk, turning to his other customer. "It's a sad pity young girls will come to this overcrowded city. It's a shame to see such a pretty little creature adrift on the world."

Making some casual reply to the clerk, the gentlemanly-appearing, handsome young man walked out of the store, quickening his pace as he reached the pavement, hurrying after the retreating little figure up the street.

Doris had purchased the veil, and only the long golden curls were visible and the prettiest dimpled chin imaginable.

"I must buy a paper and look it over," thought Doris.

And acting upon the thought, she bought a paper, and the first line that met her eye was the advertisement of an agency that furnished employment to women.

Doris made her way there without delay. There was a lady superintendent in attendance, who looked curiously at the fair young face as Doris paid her fee.

"Your name?" she said, posing the pen in her white fingers.

"Miss Thorne," Doris replied.

And it almost seemed to Doris other lips than her own must have framed that answer when she looked back at that memorable scene in the bitter, tragic after years which followed.

She gave her age as seventeen, adding, earnestly, she should like to get a position as governess, if she could.

"That is very young," returned the lady. "A governess of seventeen stands but a slim chance. Of course you have good references?" she added.

"No," replied Doris, in a low voice. "I am an utter stranger to the city."

The gentlemanly stranger had entered the agency, standing unobserved behind Doris while this conversation was going on, and now he retreated to the door.

"No reference!" said the manageress, raising her eyebrows. "Surely you must know some one who can vouch for your respectability. Requiring a reference is customary," she explained, seeing Doris draw back with wounded pride and blush to the roots of her lovely, golden hair.

"I can give none," she answered, simply.

"Then I am obliged to return your fee and take your name from our books," returned the lady.

And faint and dizzy, Doris walked out of the agency.

As she reached the pavement, her eyes blinded by tears, some one touched her arm, and, glancing up, Doris found the dark-eyed stranger she had met in the notion store bowing low before her.

CHAPTER X.

PRAYER ANSWERED.

Doris drew back with a little startled cry. The handsome, dark-eyed stranger she had first encountered in the notion store was standing before her, bowing most profoundly, as she stepped out of the employment agency, discouraged and sick at heart.

"I beg your pardon, Miss," he said, respectfully lifting his hat." I was standing in the doorway of the agency a moment since, and could not help hearing all that passed between the manageress and yourself. I am in search of some trustworthy young lady to fill a position recently and unexpectedly vacated. You are in search of a situation; suppose you try the one I have to offer."

Poor little Doris stood dumb and transfixed with joy before him. Surely God must have heard the prayer that had just gone up to heaven to

direct her to some way by which she could earn her daily bread.

It never occurred to her guileless, unsophisticated heart to mistrust him. She implicitly believed God had sent him in answer to her prayer. That this was simply an excuse to speak to her she had never once dreamed. She had not come to that knowledge of the world which teaches that men's lips often speak one thing and their hearts another.

She never suspected there was anything unusual in this procedure, or that the handsome stranger would not have asked the same question of any other young girl whom he chanced to meet on the steps of the employment bureau.

Doris clasped her tiny white hands supplicatingly before her as she replied, with trembling eagerness, straight from the depths of her heart:

"I think God must have sent you to me, sir, for I was just praying that I might find some position at once. I—I do not know very much—but I should try, oh! so hard to please you, sir, if you would only trust me with the position. I am so glad you met me instead of some one else. I did not know which way to turn. I am a stranger in New York."

"Any one could readily see that," he answered, with a light laugh, that somehow jarred harshly upon Doris.

"What is the position, sir?" she asked, timidly.

"As clerk in a retail dry goods store up town," he answered. "Remain just where you are until I summon a cab," he said, turning away. "I won't be long."

He had barely stepped to the edge of the pavement ere the manageress of the agency, with a white, anxious face, called to Doris.

"My child," she said, leaning over her desk, "would you mind telling me what that gentleman was saying to you? My motive for asking you you shall know hereafter."

In a few brief words Doris related the conversation verbatim.

"I thought as much," replied the manageress, her face dark with anger. "Would to Heaven we could find a law to punish such wretches. That man is a well-known roué; a greater rascal does not walk the streets of New York. Young girls should never speak to strangers," she went on, as she gazed at the lovely young face. "Many a trap is set for the feet of the innocent and unwary in a great, wicked city like New York. You must leave here at once," she said, thoughtfully, "before he comes back, and remember—I give you my best advice when I say, flee from that man as though he were accursed. He is not a man for you to know

or trust. I almost ask it as a prayer—for *your* sake, mind."

"I will," replied Doris, sobbing out her gratitude.

"I think I will break from our general rule, in this one instance, and help you to a situation, child."

As she spoke she hurriedly wrote down the addresses of three or four ladies whose names were on her books, in want of a governess for children.

"I sincerly hope you will be successful with some one of these," she said, handing the card to Doris.

A moment later, dazed and bewildered, Doris found herself on the street again. She had scarcely proceeded half a block ere she found herself face to face with the handsome stranger again.

"Where now, my pretty one? Where are you going, I say?" he asked, laying a detaining hand on her arm. "You did not wait for me to return."

For one moment Doris's heart almost ceased beating as she gazed up into the dark, angry face, lit up by the bold black eyes that were regarding her so intently.

"I—I have changed my mind," she said, desperately, as she shook off the touch of that white hand from her arm; "I do not want the position."

"Some one has been putting nonsense into your

SHE BEHELD FREDERICK THORNTON AND VIVIAN.—*See Chapter XVII.*

head!" he exclaimed, angrily. "I won't be trifled with in this way. Come!"

"Sir!" cried Doris, haughtily, "how *dare* you speak so to me? I am young, but I am no coward, sir!" she retorted, spiritedly. "You cannot compel me, and you have no right to urge me to accept a situation I do not wish. Let go my arm instantly and let me pass!" she panted.

"Dear me!" he cried, "what a little whirlwind! By George, now, whenever a man tells me women lose their beauty when they are thoroughly angry, that man and I will have a subject to argue on worthy of the eloquence of a politician."

In a flash Doris flew past him, hurrying down the thoroughfare like a panting, storm-driven swallow. The thrilling event which had just transpired had, at least, taught her a severe lesson; she must have nothing to say to strangers.

"There seems to be so little faith that can be placed in any one in this world," she sobbed, drawing her thick veil closer over her tear-stained face.

Doris read the three names on the card.

"I will go to the one whose name is on the list first. No doubt that is nearest."

She had some difficulty in making out the right car which she was to take; but at length she reached Mrs. Longworth's elegant mansion on Fifth avenue.

She might well open her eyes in wonder at the magnificence displayed in this luxuriant home.

"Applying for position of governess? Ah, yes you're the fifth one this morning so far," said the footman. "You will step this way to my lady's boudoir."

Doris followed him through the hall, with its crimson velvet carpets and handsome chairs, up the broad staircase, where the flowers and statues gave the place an aspect of fairyland. She saw before her a long, broad corridor, where hung some superb pictures. The man drew aside a heavy velvet curtain, and she was in Mrs. Longworth's boudoir, in the presence of that lady herself.

"Miss Brandon, who wishes to apply for the governess's position," announced the footman.

Doris stepped timidly forward, her face flushing under the sharp scrutiny of the keen, cold gray eyes bent upon her.

"Really," said Mrs. Longworth, indicating a seat with a haughty wave of her jeweled hand. "Can it be possible you are applying for my situation?"

Doris modestly answered:

"Yes, madame."

"You are so young to teach my child—scarcely more than a child yourself."

"I am seventeen," replied Doris, in a low, sweet voice.

"What are your accomplishments, young lady? I suppose you have a thorough knowledge of the languages, music, drawing, etc. I should like to hear you read. Ah, here is a French novel, and in French. This will do."

Doris took up the book, and her clear, well-modulated accents rather pleased the lady.

"I have but one child—a little daughter," she said; "and as she is destined to be more than ordinarily plain-looking, I should like her to be clever and accomplished. Will you read me a little Italian? Then you may sit down at the piano and play a few bars of something."

And Doris read again, the sweet, soft Italian falling like clear notes from her lips. Doris confessed to not being very well accomplished in music.

"That will do. And now about the remuneration expected. Taking into consideration the fact that I shall have to pay expensive masters for the branches in which you are deficient, I thought of offering you one hundred dollars a year."

Less—much less—than she paid to the humblest servant in her house. The cook would have laughed at such a sum; the housemaids have indignantly refused it; the footmen have considered

themselves insulted at such an offer; but Doris, ignorant of all this, thought it a magnificent sum, indeed.

"A hundred dollars a year!" she repeated.

Mrs. Longworth, whose conscience was not quite dead, thought she was reproaching her.

"We would begin with that," she said. "If I found my child improved under your care, I would increase it. Can you come to me soon?"

"At once, if you would like," replied Doris, gratefully.

"There remains only one thing, and that is references. Of course, having come from the bureau, you have good ones."

"I have none," replied Doris, simply. "I have no one to whom I could refer."

"In that case," replied Mrs. Longworth, "please consider our interview ended; and I shall not fail to express my indignation to the manager of the bureau for having *dared* to send me a person who had no reference to offer. Good morning." And with a cold bow, she turned to her book, as though to intimate she had nothing further to say.

There was a burning flush on Doris's face as she passed out of the elegant mansion.

"I must not lose heart," she said to herself. "I will try Mrs. Heath next."

Again Doris found herself mounting the steps of a magnificent mansion in the fashionable portion of the city.

Mrs. Heath looked up in wonder at the fair young girl ushered into her presence. Briefly Doris stated her errand.

"I may as well state, in the first place, that I have no references to offer," thought Doris; and she acted on the impulse of the moment.

"In that case it is a pity you troubled yourself by coming here," Mrs. Heath said, curtly. "You will not suit me."

Doris crushed back the tears in her blue eyes, and sought the third address on the list.

"Yes, Mrs. Dorchester is at home, Miss," said the servant, ushering Doris into a superb drawing-room. "Be seated."

It seemed to Doris she must have been seated in the drawing-room quite half an hour, waiting patiently, when suddenly she heard footsteps and the rustle of a silken robe. The next moment the door opened, and an elegantly dressed lady swept into the room. She started violently as her eyes fell upon Doris's face.

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. DORCHESTER'S COMPANION.

Like one fascinated, the lady stood motionless in the doorway, gazing at the rare beauty of the flower-like, girlish face before her.

In a moment she recovered herself and stepped forward.

"I am Mrs. Dorchester," she said, in a voice that was thoroughly refined and musical—"what can I do for you?"

"I am Miss Brandon," said Doris, timidly. "I have called from the registry office in response to your application for a governess."

"A governess!" repeated the lady. "There has been a mistake. I want a companion."

"I should like that quite as much as being a governess," said Doris, eagerly, "if I could only please you."

Mrs. Dorchester looked at her anxiously.

"Do you know," she said—and Doris was struck

with the bitterness in her voice—"that you have a very beautiful face?"

"No one ever told me so before," said Doris, honestly. "Yet even were that the case, that fact could give me no pleasure."

"No pleasure!" repeated the lady; and again Doris was struck by the exceeding bitterness of her voice. "Ah, if I had a face like yours, I would give the world, and everything else in it; and yet you—to whom God has been so good—you do not prize it."

"No," said Doris.

"Then you are not vain," replied Mrs. Dorchester, looking pleased. "If you came to me, I should want you to dress exceedingly plain—severely, strictly plain. I should want all that beautiful golden hair brushed tightly back from your face, and done up in a small knot at the back of your head. You would not like that."

"It would not matter to me, madame, if *you* were pleased with me," replied Doris; and again the lady looked gratified. She was glad to be assured that the lovely young stranger did not care about being attractive.

"Your duties would be very light," she pursued. "I would want you to sit with me and talk to me. Sing to me that I could close my eyes and *forget*

for a brief while. I am very lonely. I should like you to clasp my hands, and soothe me with gentle words, much as you would a tired child. I am very lonely. I would want you to cheer me."

"I would do my best," replied Doris, wondering greatly what manner of woman this was, who, surrounded by every luxury that the heart could desire, appeared so sad and lonely in all this splendor.

As if reading her very thoughts, the lady went on, sharply:

"I do not care much for society. I have found it fickle and unstable. I have a horror of being courted and flattered for my wealth. I might have been happier had I been poor like you. My money will not buy me that which I crave above everything else in this world. If I had a beautiful face I might win my heart's desire," she went on, wistfully, tears filling her eyes, and her bosom heaving convulsively. "If I had been offered my choice of all the gifts that Heaven gives to men and women, I should have chosen beauty."

Doris looked up into the plain, homely face of the unhappy lady in wonder. If Doris had but known the pitiful story of her life, she could have understood that bitter longing.

"I want some one near me who is very sympathetic," she said, earnestly. "You please me

better than any one else whom they have sent from the agency. You will not complain at the stipulation. I am sure we can agree as to terms."

"Oh, yes, madame. I am sure of that," responded Doris.

Suddenly a thought seemed to flit through Mrs. Dorchester's brain. Rising hurriedly, she crossed to the mantel and took from it a cabinet photograph, which was inclosed in a closed velvet case.

"This is my husband's portrait," she said, opening the case and handing it to Doris. "Although he married me—a plain woman—he is a great beauty-worshiper," she said, eying Doris keenly as she spoke.

One glance at the pictured face, and Doris turned pale and red by turns, almost falling to the floor in a deep swoon.

The pictured face, smiling up at her from the crimson velvet frame, was the dark, handsome, wicked face of the stranger who had accosted her on the agency steps.

Before Doris could utter the cry of astonishment and dismay that rose to her lips, there was the sound of approaching footsteps, the door was thrown open, and handsome, dashing Lawrence Dorchester, the merchant prince, stood on the threshold. Yes, there was no mistake. Her persecutor

of that morning was the original of the portrait she still held clutched in her trembling hand.

His wife, watching him intently, noted the start of surprise, and heard the exclamation that he crushed back as his eyes fell upon Doris.

"This young lady, Miss Brandon, has applied for the position of companion to me, Lawrence," explained Mrs. Dorchester.

A perfect rapture of delight shone in his black eyes.

"She is admirably suited for it, I am sure—most admirably. You cannot do better than engage this very charming young lady at once. She will be a capital acquisition to our household, which has been dull beyond all endurance."

No more embarrassing situation could be imagined. Mrs. Dorchester drew herself up with a proud, stately air. She grew white to the lips.

It pained her to the very heart's core to have the secret sorrow of her life thus rudely laid bare before this young stranger.

"Engage this pretty girl, by all means, my dear," he said, turning to his wife with a low bow. "I am glad to see you are overcoming your prejudice. My wife has always had a constitutional horror of pretty faces, as I have a constitutional liking for them," he said, with a laugh, turning to Doris. "I

leave you to make your own arrangements. I shall be pleased to see you installed in my house."

With a very elaborate bow to both, he quitted the room, smiling to Doris as he closed the door.

"My husband does not mean anything by his flowery manner of speech," said Mrs. Dorchester, forcing a painful smile to her white, trembling lips. And Doris saw the effort she made to control herself. Then, after a pause, the unhappy lady looked up at her.

"I am very sorry," she said, "very sorry; but you are too young. I—I need some one older than you. I cannot engage you."

Doris understood perfectly why the unhappy lady had changed her mind so suddenly. She was but an innocent child, yet she was rapidly learning many of life's hard lessons.

"I am sorry," said Doris, gently.

"You would not have been in peace here," sighed the lady. "I—I—was mad, I think, not to have thought of this before. I am sorry I have detained you. Good morning, child. I wish you well."

Doris quitted the grand mansion that held so much splendid misery, feeling as though one of the gates of life had been closed behind her.

She must try again and again: it was useless to

give up. She knew very well that she must find work or—starve.

She wondered, vaguely, why the manageress of the agency had sent her to the very house of the man against whom she had warned her.

It had been a mistake. While speaking of him the manageress had unintentionally jotted down that address.

There was but one remaining place to go to, and, wearily enough, Doris wended her way there.

Again Doris was ushered into a sumptuous drawing-room, and the little serving-maid announced to the mistress, Mrs. Vane, that a very pretty young woman had been sent from the agency this time.

"I hope she will suit," sighed Mrs. Vane, descending to the drawing-room. She was quite pleased with Doris. "I will see what my daughter thinks about engaging you for her younger sister. I usually consult her in everything. Send Miss Isabel here," she said to the servant who responded to the touch of the bell.

"Dear me! what can she want?" cried a petulant voice in the upper corridor, and a moment later a young lady, with her hair still in curl papers, and a rather soiled blue silk wrapper, entered the room.

"My dear," said the mother humbly, "this young girl has come to apply for the position of governess

to your little sister, Daisy. Do you think she would suit us?"

Isabel Vane stared haughtily at the lovely, flower-like face, and after a few remarks, rose and quitted the room, calling her mother to join her for a moment.

"You will excuse me for a few moments," said Mrs. Vane, anxious to make up in kindness for her daughter's lack of courtesy.

Doris bowed.

She soon heard the daughter in a high dispute with the mother in an adjoining room.

"I really believe you have taken leave of your senses to even think of bringing a girl like that into the house for Captain Alden to see and fall in love with."

"She seems like such a nice, modest young person, Isabel," said the mother—"really the nicest who has applied yet. She could be kept well in the background when the captain is here. I could manage that, I am sure."

"If she knew there was a handsome young man coming to the house whom your daughter wished to marry, rest assured the artful minx would contrive to put herself in his way. No, no, she must not, she shall not come. I won't have her, I say. You ought to have known she wouldn't suit the moment you looked at her. A pretty governess in the

house to try to outwit me with my lover! I say it isn't to be thought of! He's coming to call for me this forenoon to go riding in the park; get her out of the house before he comes," she cried, shrilly.

Isabel Vane flounced up-stairs, and her mother returned to Doris, never dreaming she had heard all.

"I am sorry. You are a little too inexperienced, I fear," she said, kindly. "I am sorry, but I cannot engage you."

Tears sprang to Doris's pretty blue eyes, and that quite distressed the gentle, tender-hearted lady. She arose quickly to depart.

"Stay a moment, my good girl," said Mrs. Vane, laying a kindly hand on her arm. "Perhaps I can put you in the way of obtaining a good position. Now that I think of it, I remember Mrs. Thornton, the banker's wife, wants a companion. I will give you a note to her."

The words had hardly left her lips ere Doris threw up her hands, and fell in a dead faint upon the floor.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE SERVANTS' HALL.

When Doris opened her eyes, she found Mrs. Vane bending over her in the greatest consternation. Out in the corridor Miss Isabel's voice could be heard, shrilly giving orders that the girl must be taken from the drawing-room down to the servants' hall, without delay.

"It will not be necessary," said Doris, struggling to her feet. "I am going now, madame."

"Was it the closeness of the room that made you faint, my poor child? or—or did you faint from want of—of food, or anything of that kind? Pardon me, I could not send you away so, if it was," said Mrs. Vane, pitying the sweet, death-white face.

Doris flushed.

"It was only a sudden faintness that seized me, madame—a sharp pain at my heart," she answered, truthfully; but she did not add that it was the

mention of her handsome, faithless young husband's mother's name that brought that terrible pain there.

Frederick's mother wanted a companion. Dare *she*—the forsaken bride, the injured young wife—go to her? The very thought almost took her breath away, and bewildered her. Her head was in a whirl; her heart beat so loud and so fast, she was sure the lady must hear it.

"I hope you will be successful, my child," said Mrs. Vane, bowing her out of the drawing-room.

"Too pretty to suit," whispered the maid to Doris as she led the way to the front door. "If you went to Lamartine, and got him to paint a few wrinkles on your face, you would not find it half so hard to get a place."

"Who is Lamartine?" asked Doris, scarcely knowing herself why she asked the question.

"He is the man to whom every one in New York goes for disguises," laughed the maid. "He can change any one so completely that one can hardly recognize one's self. Why, a forger who had taken a great amount of money lately, stayed near the scene of the robbery for weeks. He was so cleverly disguised, his own brother did not know him. When the affair leaked out, it was found he had been to Lamartine."

Doris's every nerve thrilled as she listened. A sudden idea flashed through her brain,—Why should *she* not go to Lamartine? If he could disguise her in perfect safety, she would dare to enter her husband's home.

Different characters yield to different temptations. The temptation to enter the home of Frederick's mother—look upon the face of the husband who had so ruthlessly deserted her, almost at the very altar,—was so sweet, so subtle, she could not resist it, for, Heaven help her, in spite of all, she loved her handsome young husband still.

"Loved him with a bitter yearning that would never pass away;
Loved him with a ceaseless passion that would never know decay."

Yes, she would go to Lamartine. It must have been fate that caused the maid at Mrs. Vane's to utter those words to her.

She found the place with but little difficulty. It was noon hour, and Monsieur's parlors were for the time deserted.

Doris entered timidly, and a moment later the dapper little "artist," as he chose to call himself, appeared.

"You wish to see me, madame? he said. "In what can I be of service to you?"

"I want—a disguise," she answered, "so complete—so perfect—I could not be recognized by any one who ever saw me before."

"It will be difficult to find one like that," he said, looking at the lovely young face in intense surprise. "A mystery, a romance; perhaps an elopement will be the outcome of this affair," he thought.

"I see a way to meet your wishes, madame," he said aloud, "but it will be a sad pity to change such a face—for any reason; still, if you desire it to be done, I shall comply, of course."

"I want it done," said Doris.

He gave her a hand basin containing a dark, clear liquid and a sponge, and bade her sponge her face lightly with the mixture; and though she had come there purposely for the disguise, now that she was on the point of acquiring it, her whole soul rose in rebellion against it.

Monsieur Lamartine saw her hesitation, and fancied that she was anxious about her clear, white, delicate skin.

"You need not fear it," he said; "the liquid is quite harmless. All trace of it will disappear if you use this," showing her a bottle of clear amber liquid. "Three drops of this, put into cold water will, at any time, remove the stain. Bathe your face well with the sponge."

She obeyed him shrinkingly.

Then, indicating another seat before a table covered with toilet articles and innumerable labeled bottles, he bade her unbind her lovely golden curls.

For quite half an hour he busied himself over the long, shining tresses. Then he asked her to look in the glass. Doris looked, and sat staring in wonder at the strange face the mirror reflected. She would never have recognized her own self. She saw a dark-brown face, dark arched eyebrows and lashes, a low forehead half revealed, half concealed by a mass of dark, wavy hair.

"If those blue eyes were but black you would be a perfect brunette, and the change in your appearance complete. Are you satisfied?"

Doris bowed her head in assent. When she paid Monsieur Lamartine his charges, she found she had not one cent left.

"I hope whatever object this has to serve is an honorable one, and may therefore help your purpose," he said, bowing Doris out of the parlor.

Out on the street Doris shrank from the gaze of passers-by. It almost seemed to her they must know she was not what she represented herself to be. Though she had adopted this measure for looking again upon her husband's face, hearing his

voice, remaining unrecognized herself, there was something so false and deceptive about it that her sweet, candid nature rebelled against it; yet the one passionate, craving desire to enter the home of the husband who had deserted her led her on.

By patient inquiry Doris found that the home of the Thorntons was in the suburbs of the metropolis. She was obliged to walk the distance. At length she reached the villa. Ah! what a magnificent place it was!—on the brow of the hill that sloped gently to the glittering Hudson.

Her heart gave a great bound. This was Frederick's home!

Timidly she entered the great arched gateway and walked up the long, paved walk to the house.

Green, velvety, close-shaven lawns, brilliant with beds of rare flowers, dotted here and there, stretched out on either side. Marble statues gleamed amid the green foliage, and fountains rippled in the sunshine. Gorgeous peacocks strutted over the greensward, and song-birds swung gayly to and fro in their gilded cages on the verandas of the grand gray stone house.

"Ah me!" sobbed Doris, bitterly, "was there ever such a bitter fate as mine? I should be coming here to-day as Frederick's happy bride, instead of creeping up to these doors, applying for the

position of paid companion to his haughty lady mother."

Suddenly from around the corner of the building sprang a large, ferccious blood-hound, and at his heels was a tall slip of a girl, in a fluttering white dress, her red, tangled hair flying in the breeze, her cheeks glowing, and her eyes bright with the excitement.

Doris's heart beat fast. Intuitively, she knew this must be Frederick's youngest sister—"Trixy, the Romp," as he had designated her. Before she could take but that first fleeting glance, the dog had observed the stranger, and sprang toward her with a loud, savage growl.

Doris recoiled in terror, uttering a piteous cry of dismay.

"Down, Tiger, down," cried Trixy Thornton, seizing the dog by the collar as she gained his side quite out of breath. "For shame, frightening a stranger so.

"He won't harm you," she said, turning to Doris. "He looks big and ferocious, but he's only an overgrown puppy. Who did you wish to see?" she asked, coming closer to Doris, and looking curiously into the sweet, sad, dark face.

"Mrs. Thornton," replied Doris. "I have brought a letter from Mrs. Vane. I have come to

apply for the position of companion to Mrs. Thornton."

"My gracious! you'd make a much better companion for me," laughed Trixy, shaking back her mane of tangled red curls, and whistling for the dog to follow. "Come this way, please. You shall see mamma at once. I hope she will engage you."

Doris's heart warmed to the impulsive girl at once. She could have knelt down beside her, and kissed her pretty white hands.

Trixy led Doris directly to her mother's boudoir.

"Mamma," she said, "here is a young lady who brings you a letter from Mrs. Vane."

Mrs. Thornton glanced up languidly from her book, and motioning Doris to a seat, carefully perused the letter.

"Mrs. Vane has omitted mentioning your name. May I inquire what it is?" she asked at length.

"Doris Carlisle," replied Doris, faintly, and she shuddered, recalling the old trite and true lines:

> Oh, what a tangled web we weave
> When first we practice to deceive."

No one ever yet practiced a deception but what she found herself entangled in many more to escape the consequences of the first.

It was so with poor Doris.

"You are quite young, Miss Carlisle," replied Mrs. Thornton, turning a pair of dark eyes on her, that reminded her so much of Frederick's. "Still, you could have no better recommendation than a letter from Mrs. Vane. Dear me, Miss Carlisle, what are you gazing at so intently?"

It was a portrait in crayon of Frederick Thornton. Doris was gazing at the pictured, smiling face with her heart in her eyes.

Mrs. Thornton's remark, and the haughty wonder in her voice, recalled Doris's scattered senses.

"The portrait is—is—so like *your* face, madame," stammered Doris, confusedly.

"It is the portrait of my son," replied Mrs. Thornton, the frown clearing from her face once more. She was always pleased when any one spoke of a resemblance between her handsome son and herself.

This proud, cold woman loved her daughters after her own stately fashion, but she fairly idolized her son.

To Doris's intense delight, after answering the usual questions, Mrs. Thornton decided to engage her as companion.

"When can you come, Miss Carlisle?" she asked.

"At once," replied Doris, fearing to leave her lest she should change her mind.

"That will please me," said Mrs. Thornton. "Your luggage can be sent for to-morrow."

Thus it was that poor, hapless Doris, the deserted young bride, gained an entrance into the household of her mother-in-law. Only Heaven could have foretold where this rash step was to lead. It would have been better for Doris had death claimed her then and there.

CHAPTER XIII.

WRITING LETTERS.

"I hope I have not done an imprudent thing in engaging this young girl," thought Mrs. Thornton, laying down her book, and gazing thoughtfully out of the window. "There seems something strange about her—something I cannot quite comprehend. If ever there was a tragedy in a human face, there is one written in hers."

Then she dismissed the subject from her thoughts. She had sent for Doris to come to her boudoir as soon as she felt herself sufficiently rested; and in a short time Doris returned to her.

It was quite noticeable to Mrs. Thornton how

strange and ill at ease Miss Carlisle was in her presence.

"I must set her at ease," she thought. 'Dear me, this shyness is most uncomfortable."

So she talked easily and kindly to Doris, until the white, startled face grew calm and still.

"You shall write some letters for me after luncheon, Miss Carlisle," she said. "The first, and by far the most important of them all, is to my son. He left home only this morning to be gone a fortnight, and it almost seems to me that he has been gone a week."

In all her life, Doris never experienced more conflicting emotions than when she wrote that letter which Frederick's mother dicated.

The white hands trembled so over the words "My darling Frederick," that she could scarcely hold the pen; but with a great effort she controlled herself, knowing that the eyes of his mother were regarding her curiously.

"Your hand trembles, Miss Carlisle," she said, frowning. "Are you of a nervous temperament? I have a horror of nervous people."

"I am not nervous," replied Doris, in a low voice. "Oh, I hope I have not annoyed you. I—I was anxious to write the letter as nicely as I could."

"One should always take the greatest pains with

every duty one has to perform," said Mrs. Thornton. "Well, now that you have it fairly commenced, go on to say the house seems more than lonely to me without him; that I shall expect him home sooner than a fortnight, if he can adjust matters satisfactorily.

"Say that the ball which we had arranged to take place on the 20th of this month, we shall set for the eighteenth. And last—and by far the most pleasing news for him—say that Vivian, his sweetheart, is coming to spend a few days at the villa. That will bring him home quickly, if anything can."

Of course, it was only her fancy, but Mrs. Thornton quite imagined that she heard a little, gasping cry. The dark head bent lower over the white page. She could not see Miss Carlisle's face.

"Heaven help me! how can I write that!" thought Doris, crushing back the bitter tears that threatened to fall from her long lashes and blot the page. "Oh, God! how can I, his wife—who love him so—write those words!"

She had not thought of facing such bitter heart pangs as this, when she entered her husband's home in disguise, accepting the position of companion to his haughty lady mother.

"You write slowly, Miss Carlisle," said Mrs. Thornton, frowning impatiently. "You heard

what I dictated last, did you not? The sentence was, Miss Courtney, his fiancée, is to spend a few days with us."

Making a desperate effort at self-control, Doris penned the words, and they seemed to dance in a blood-red mist before her eyes. She longed, with a bitter longing she could hardly repress, to cry out:

"Vivian Courtney can never marry your son, cold, proud lady, for he is already wedded, and to me."

What would Mrs. Thornton have said had she known that this young girl sitting so quietly by her side was her idolized son's young wife—bride to her brilliant, handsome young heir—whom she loved as she loved no one else on earth, and who had been parted from her bridegroom at the very altar, as it were.

At last the letter was finished, sealed and directed. Doris could have bent her head and kissed the envelope, for she knew it would rest in his hands; those dear, strong, white hands, that had thrilled her heart to the very core as they had clasped hers on that memorable wedding night, as she stood with him, so cold and awed and frightened, before the altar.

"The rest of the letters can remain until after luncheon."

Doris had not heard the remark; she was thinking how fortunate it was that Frederick Thornton had never seen her writing.

Mrs. Thornton was just about to speak again, when she was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Isabel and Gwendolin Thornton.

Doris raised her eyes in breathless anxiety to see what Frederick's sisters were like. Cold and proud, like their haughty mother. She saw that at a glance; but despite this, her heart gave a strange thrill as Isabel Thornton glanced toward her with eyes so startlingly like her brother's.

"My daughters, this is Miss Carlisle, my new companion," said the mother, languidly.

Both young ladies bowed coldly to Doris, then seemed to ignore her presence completely. Doris rose to leave the room.

"You need not go," said Mrs. Thornton; and Doris resumed her seat. Their whole conversation was about the coming ball, and about their brother.

"I shall be so glad to see Frederick settled in life at last," murmured his mother. "I have always been in great fear lest he should fall in love with some girl—a nobody with a pretty face—and marry her on the impulse of the moment, he is so very impulsive."

"I believe, even in that case, you would have for-

given him, mamma," laughed Gwendolin, lightly; "you idolize him so."

Mrs. Thornton drew herself up to her fullest height.

"Knowing my principles as well as you do, you surprise me by uttering such a remark, Gwendolin," she said, severely. "Much as I love him, that is the one thing that I could never have forgiven my son—marrying beneath him. I would disown him in the moment I heard of such an act of folly. He should never inherit one dollar of the Thornton estate. I would rather see him lying dead at my feet than married beneath him."

"You are pleased with Vivian," smiled Gwendolin.

"The desire of my heart will be gratified when my son marries Vivian Courtney," replied her mother. "She is beautiful, an heiress to a million in her own right, and is a lady by birth and education. She is in every way fitted to become Frederick's bride. Why should I not be pleased?"

Doris's heart turned cold as she listened. Every word cut her heart like the thrust of a dagger. She could have cried aloud as the words fell, clear, distinct and cruel, from those cold, proud lips.

She had treasured the wild hope in her poor, hungry heart that she might be able by a world of

patience and endurance to win her way at last to Frederick's mother's heart; *now* she saw how futile had been that wild fancy. It could never be done—never while the sun shone or the grass grew. How little hope there was for her, after all.

Her bowed head dropped lower and lower. Mrs. Thornton noticed it.

"You look tired, Miss Carlisle," she said. "Perhaps you would like to walk out into the grounds; the air is refreshing."

Doris gladly availed herself of the opportunity.

Out in the solitude of the grounds, when quite shut out from the view of the open windows by the interlacing trees, Doris threw up her white arms with a bitter cry to Heaven:

"Oh, I can never endure it!" she cried. "It would drive me mad!—yes, mad. I thought I was stronger, but, no, my heart is breaking. After I have looked upon Frederick's false, handsome face I will go quietly away."

The words had scarcely died away on her lips ere she beheld a sight which made her catch her breath with a startled cry.

A young girl in a white mull dress, carrying a white parasol in her hand edged with Oriental lace, came swiftly up the path. It was Vivian Courtney.

Would Vivian recognize her, despite the dark, disguising stain on her fair face and golden hair?

It was a moment of intense suspense to Doris. Her heart beat in great stifling throbs, and terror deepened in her blue eyes. With desperate hands she clung tightly to the marble railing that surrounded the fountain.

Nearer, nearer Vivian approached, eyeing intently the slender, girlish figure standing by the fountain. There was something strangely familiar about her, yet, looking into the dark face, Vivian did not recognize her.

With quick steps she passed Doris by and went on to the house.

"I am safe!" muttered Doris, drawing her breath hard. "*She does not know me.*"

She looked after Vivian, the graceful, haughty beauty, the belle of the seminary in that other life which seemed so far behind her, whom Frederick Thornton loved.

Young, an heiress, the idol of both parents' and lover's heart—ah, what more had life to offer her?

So much had been given to Vivian, while to *her* had been given—*nothing*. She asked herself why God had distributed His gifts so unfairly. Even the love that would have crowned her life and made

this poor earth a heaven to her, had been taken from her and given to Vivian, the beauty.

And, standing there in the red glow of the sunlight, the words of the poet came to her—

> "No one could tell, for nobody knew.
> Why love was made to gladden a few;
> And hearts that would forever be true
> Go lone and starved the whole way through,"

"But for her he might have loved me," sobbed Doris, and the pangs of jealousy, more bitter to endure than death, swept through the girl's heart.

Slowly she walked back to the house, and up to Mrs. Thornton's boudoir; that lady was in the best of spirits.

"I am glad you are here, Miss Carlisle," she said. "I want you to go to the apartments that have been set apart for Miss Courtney's use, and see that they are in readiness for her. See that fresh flowers are put in the vases, and this portrait of my son Frederick placed on the mantel."

CHAPTER XIV.

LIFE IS TOO HARD TO BEAR.

Doris took the portrait and turned away. Mrs. Thornton must not see the deadly pallor that stole over her as her eyes rested on that handsome face.

Out in the corridor, beyond the gaze of his mother's stern eyes, poor, hapless Doris gave full vent to her pent-up feelings.

"He was hers," she cried out, covering the portrait with passionate kisses. "No one else had a right to love him. The picture belonged in *her* room—not Vivian's."

Doris carried out Mrs. Thornton's instructions faithfully—all save placing Frederick Thornton's portrait on Vivian's mantel. *That* she carried to her own room and hid it securely from all prying eyes (never dreaming of the cruel consequences that would accrue from that rash act), there to worship it in secret.

Poor Doris! Despite the fact that she believed her young husband had willfully and deliberately deserted her, she still loved him with a wonderful, noble love; there was something half divine in its intensity. Only a noble girl could be capable of such a love. The fire of passion does not touch ignoble souls; they are incapable of it.

During the next few days of Vivian's stay at Thornton Villa Doris avoided her as much as possible. A bitter pang of jealousy shot through her heart that she could neither subdue nor control, as her eyes rested upon her rival. It seemed to Doris that Vivian was growing more beautiful each day. It was little wonder Frederick Thornton loved her. Gay, piquant Vivian could count lovers by the score.

They were all so fond of Vivian at Thornton Villa it made Doris's heart ache to see it. She had had such wild, vain hopes of coming to Frederick's home and winning her way to the hearts of his mother and sister! Before she had been in that aristocratic household a week she knew her dream would never be realized.

One afternoon, while she was reading to Mrs. Thornton, a telegram came.

"It is from my son," said his mother, laying it down with a pleased smile. "Will you oblige me, Miss Carlisle, by going to find Isabel and Vivian,

and telling them Frederick will be with us this evening? I think you will find them in Vivian's room. They were there reading not half an hour since. Why, how white you look, Miss Carlisle! Are you ill?" she asked, in wonder. "You seem dazed!"

"No! no!" murmured Doris, striving to hide her intense excitement and piteous confusion. "The room is so warm!"

"And I think it extremely cold for this season of the year," replied Mrs. Thornton, impatiently.

Doris never knew how she left the room. The ceiling, the floor, the cold, proud face of Frederick's haughty lady-mother, seemed to whirl around her. She remembered nothing until she found herself in the broad corridor.

She could not go to Vivian's room yet. She must sit down and try to collect her scattered senses—try to still the trembling that had seized her.

Frederick was coming home. In a few short hours he would be there, and beneath his mother's roof he would meet the poor, helpless little bride he had so cruelly deserted almost at the very altar. Yet her disguise was so perfect he would not recognize her; Vivian had not.

"I am growing dazed, as Mrs. Thornton says," she murmured. "I had almost forgotten to deliver her message."

Still trembling pitifully, she moved on down the corridor, and standing at the western window, she saw Isabel Thornton and Vivian. She walked up to them like one in a dream.

Vivian turned her head haughtily, and looked at the slim, dark figure who had stopped beside her, in surprise. Evidently she was not pleased with this interruption of the conversation she was having with Isabel.

Then poor Doris made the first fatal mistake of her life.

"Frederick is coming here," she said. "He will be here this evening."

The sound of her own voice seemed so hoarse and unnatural Doris could never have recognized it herself.

Isabel Thornton gazed at her in astonishment, not unmixed with dismay. The familiar way in which her mother's paid companion spoke of her brother Frederick amazed her.

In that instant Doris saw her almost fatal mistake, and hastened to repair the great error.

"These were your mother's words," she said,

shrinking back confusedly. "I repeated her message in her own words."

And turning away before Isabel Thornton could find her voice, she fled like a startled doe down the corridor again.

"A droll creature," laughed Isabel, turning to her companion. "There seems to be something so mysterious and strange about her."

"I have been thinking the same thing myself," returned Vivian, with a merry laugh. "She reminds me of some one whom I have seen; but I cannot think who, to save my life. She is pretty, too, with a strange, weird sort of gypsyish beauty. I never remember seeing before such deep blue eyes, with such a brune complexion and jetty hair. Do you know the fancy comes to me that I have seen that girl before?"

"She is hardly worth discussing, my dear Vivian," said Isabel, yawning, "yet, strange to say, our Trixy is quite fond of her."

That afternoon, an hour later, Doris suddenly encountered Vivian at the door of her room, as she was passing by.

"I was just wishing that I could see you," said Vivian. "I have a little favor to ask of you. Would you mind coming into my room and helping me a

little with my toilet? I—I wish to look particularly nice this afternoon."

A fierce, bitter pang shot through Doris's jealous heart. She knew but too well why Vivian Courtney desired to look so particularly nice on this eventful evening; it was because Frederick Thornton was expected home.

Silently she followed Vivian into her room, half a dozen of the beauty's prettiest dresses were lying across the bed; she had evidently been inspecting them.

"Not one of them seems to please me to-day," declared Vivian. "I would like you to exercise your good taste by judging for me. Do you think this cream lace, with great clusters of deep-red passion roses at the belt, would be most becoming? or do you fancy I would look best in that rose-pink mull? or the Nile green silk, with the white lace, on the back of that chair by the window?"

"There seems to be little choice between the three, Miss Vivian," said Doris, in a hard, constrained voice.

"I think the cream lace will be more attractive," said Vivian, reflectively. "Will you kindly assist me a little with the looping on the left side—it has come out."

Doris bowed her head and took up the dress.

Ah, how, beautiful Vivian would look in it she well knew. How admiringly the eyes of Frederick Thornton would rest on her---she would wear it to be attractive to him—and the thought was bitter as death to Doris.

How radiant Vivian looked when she stood before the mirror dressed! The cream lace dress, which showed every line of her exquisitely slender, graceful figure to the fullest advantage; the round white arms, bare to the elbows, were encircled by ruby bands that sparkled like coals of fire, whichever way she turned; a necklace of rubies encircled her fair, white throat, and a dazzling butterfly, with gold and ruby wings, caught back her jetty curls. Her cheeks were flushed, and her dark eyes glowed.

"You have a wonderful tact for arranging one's toilet, Miss Carlisle," said Vivian, critically surveying the effect in the mirror, and smiling pleasedly—"you have missed your vocation, I think. You ought to have been a lady's maid instead of a companion."

How Doris longed to turn to her and cry out:

"You are mistaken. Heaven never intended me for the one or the other—but for what I am—Frederick Thornton's wife."

"I shall remember your kindness in assisting me," said Vivian, loftily, "and to-morrow I will look

over my wardrobe and see if I can pick up something for you, Miss Carlisle; you are very clever—very."

"Do not trouble yourself, I beg of you," said Doris, stiffly. "I would accept nothing—nothing whatever from your hands."

A sudden thought seemed to strike the petted young heiress.

"Perhaps you would not be averse to a little spending money, then, Miss Carlisle. I wish to show my appreciation in some substantial manner."

Doris recoiled quickly.

"No, no," she answered, huskily. "I could not accept a penny from you. I want nothing at your hands. Nothing."

And she hurriedly quitted the room ere Vivian could reply.

"Was there ever such an odd, strange little creature?" murmured the heiress. "Yet, there is something about her that quite fascinates me in spite of myself."

She went down to the drawing-room to join Isabel and Gwendolin, and thought no more of the little companion with the brune face and dark hair.

Meanwhile, Doris was in her own room, sobbing as though her heart would break.

How she wished that she had never come to this

stately, cold, proud home. It was too late to undo it now. She must live through it, let it be what it might.

Oh, if Heaven would but help her! The only wish just at that moment in her heart was, that she could turn her face to the wall and die—die, even though he would be there in a few short hours, and the desire of her heart—to look once more on his face—be granted.

She would like to kneel, with the portrait clasped close to her heart, by her white bed and die there.

It mattered little to her what they would think or say when they came and found her dead.

Frederick would *hear* of it. And perhaps he would come and look upon her face, understand it all, and recognize her and feel sorry; and, in his sorrow bend and kiss her death-cold lips. He would know she died because she could not live without him.

CHAPTER XV.

A TORTURED HEART.

Frederick was coming home. In a few hours from now she should see him.

The idea seemed almost more than she could grasp. What would he say when he found her there? That question began to assume a terrible form to poor Doris. Would there be a scene?

She knelt there, in the red glow of the sunlight, trying in vain to drive the terrible doubts and fears away. Perhaps it was some faint foreshadowing of the sorrow to come that made her tremble as she knelt there—the first thrill of that strange tragedy which was to cross her life.

There came a tap at the door.

"Mrs. Thornton would be glad to have Miss Carlisle come to her boudoir."

And with a slow, hesitating step, Doris went.

"I want you to read to me, Miss Carlisle," she

said. "I never remembered an afternoon to pass so slowly."

Mechanically, Doris picked up the book. The lines on the page seemed to waver before her eyes. The dusk crept up, and the stars came out. Long since one of the little maids had entered and lighted the chandelier. Still Doris read on. It was better than talking. Doris felt that she should go mad if Mrs Thornton were to talk to her about Frederick and Vivian—her favorite subject.

Suddenly there was a sound of carriage wheels stopping before the porch, and the next moment voices were heard in the lower hall.

"My son has arrived," said Mrs. Thornton.

Doris spoke no word. Her face grew pale as marble, even under the brune tint. She could count the great, gasping heart throbs. She clung with cold, trembling hands to the table lest she should fall, praying, with white lips and shadowed eyes, that she might not die when her eyes fell upon his face.

Some minutes passed—how many Doris never knew. Then came the sound of footsteps that Doris knew so well. She pressed her hand on her heart, for its wild beating frightened her as each step fell on her ear. She could have cried aloud in agony

with the terrible tension of her nerves; but her white lips could form no sound.

The next minute he had entered the room. Handsome, laughing Frederick Thornton stood before her. She never understood why the sight did not kill her. Why, when her eyes rested upon him, she did not fall dead.

Oh, how kindly he greeted his mother, laughing heartily when she told him the days he had spent away from her seemed like so many months.,

How strange it was that he could laugh, Doris thought, when the sin of breaking a heart lay at his door.

Doris shrank back among the shadows of the heavy silken curtains, but Mrs. Thornton spoke her name, and Doris rose slowly.

"Frederick, my son, this is my companion, Miss Carlisle," she heard his mother say; what else was uttered Doris never knew.

Frederick Thornton looked carelessly in the direction she indicated. He saw a small, slim, dark-faced little creature, who seemed to be trembling with confusion, he thought. His eyes rested on her only an instant. Then with a low bow he turned away.

Doris stood rooted to the spot. Silent, motionless all the tragedy and passion of her love shining in, her face, her arms fell helplessly to her side. She

could not have moved to have saved her life. She had expected, despite the change in her, that he, the handsome young husband, who had wedded her, would recognize her; that he would cry out either in anger or emotion. But no; he turned away, knowing her not. Oh, the pity of it!—the cruel pity of it!

She remembered how they had parted in the sunny hotel parlor.

"I shall be back within an hour," he had said, as he tossed the well-filled purse into her lap to replenish her wardrobe; then, with a smile and a nod, without a farewell kiss, he had turned and walked out of the room, leaving her to her fate.

She remembered the horrible nights and the days that had followed—how she nearly went mad with watching for him and calling wildly upon him to come back to her.

And she remembered the crowning blow of all—when the good old housekeeper had taken her in her arms, attempting to soothe her as though she had been a little child, as she whispered the pitiful words in her ear:

"Do not grieve and weep for him, child; in my opinion he is not worth a tear. He will never come back; he has deserted you."

Doris lived over again that horrible scene, as, quite

unnoticed, she gazed at the handsome face of her faithless young husband. Oh! why had he married her if he had intended to desert her?

Of the terrible accident that had occurred, nearly costing Frederick Thornton his life, and the loss of memory as to the late events which had transpired, sweeping away all remembrance of a bride who awaited him, of course Doris knew nothing; and thus fate continued to play at cross-purposes with these two. It was to end in a tragedy so pitiful that the angels would weep for Doris, the helpless child-bride whose young life had all gone wrong.

In the evening the ladies assembled in the drawing-room, where Frederick and his father awaited them. Doris would have given much to absent herself, but Mrs. Thornton insisted that she should be present. There seemed no loophole of escape for her.

Frederick and Vivian were standing by one of the lace-draped windows as she entered; his handsome face was bent over her, and he was talking to her in so low a tone Doris could not catch the words he uttered.

What was he saying to her that brought that lovely flush to Vivian's cheeks and the bright light to her eyes? Was he complimenting her on her beauty? Was he, who was bound to another by

every tie that Heaven holds sacred—daring to speak to her of—love?

The banker and his wife watched them, and nodded and smiled to each other. Gwendolin and Isabel sat at the piano discussing some pieces of music, and Beatrix sat curled up in an arm-chair watching the anguished face of her mother's young companion with much curiosity.

"Dear me, what a tragical expression!" thought Trixy, shuddering. "How she watches my brother and Vivian, and—can it be possible?—there are tears in her eyes. Poor girl! why is she so unhappy? I wonder if mamma has been scolding her or threatening to discharge her."

All unconscious of this intense scrutiny, Doris still sat watching the two, standing by the moon-lit window.

"How beautiful Vivian is!" thought Doris, sick at heart. "No wonder he regrets that on the impulse of the moment he married me instead of Vivian, the beauty. Ah, who could resist her? Was she not the very queen of love?"

Women have suffered much and will suffer again; they have endured the pangs of death with a smile; they have listened to words which were their death warrant, and have answered with a bright laugh; they have stood still, firm and undis-

mayed, while the sharpest sword has pierced their hearts; but perhaps no woman ever suffered more keenly than Doris as she sat watching Frederick Thornton and Vivian. She saw him offer Vivian his arm, and together they stepped from the long French window out on to the porch, and down into the rose garden beyond.

How tenderly he had drawn the light scarf over Vivian's shoulders, fearful lest the night wind should blow upon her too roughly.

Oh, how Doris longed to follow them!—follow and confront them in the path, crying out: "He is mine! Do not take him from me! You have every blessing the world holds dear, while I have only him! I am alone in the world but for him! Send him from you! Do not smile upon him! And Heaven may let his estranged heart drift back to me. I alone have the right to his love!"

She rose from her seat with that wild, rash intention; then she remembered where she was.

"What is the matter, Miss Carlisle?" said Frederick's mother. "There is a look in your eyes which startles me. Are you tired?"

"Yes," replied Doris, faintly.

"Then you had better retire to your own room," said Mrs. Thornton.

Doris gladly availed herself of this permission.

Her window looked out on the rose garden and the fountain. She could watch them unobserved. When she reached her room and stole breathlessly to the window, she found they were not there. They must have passed to some other portion of the gr

Poor Doris stood by the window, her hands closely locked together, the bitter tears falling from her eyes. She had had her heart's desire. She had looked upon Frederick Thornton's face again. She had heard his voice. For this she had borne the almost intolerable restraint of her disguise, and had dared enter his home. She had believed that looking upon his face just once more would still and calm the fever that was burning her heart away. She believed after that the terrible pain of longing would die away.

Instead of that, it was redoubled; it was intensified a thousand times. That first glance at her husband's handsome, laughing face had roused her love into full and active life again.

She had said to herself she would look at him just once, and go away. Was she ready to go now? Oh, no, no!—a thousand times no!

What should she do, then? Live on in this way beneath his mother's roof, a paid companion, or should she go and seek her husband, when the house

was still and dark, and beg of him to tell her why he had married her and spoiled her life if he meant to desert her?

She would tell him the cruel rumors that they were circulating—that beautiful Vivian was his sweetheart, and that he was soon to marry her—and beg him to refute those stories, for it could never be true while she, his wife, lived. He had deserted her, it was true, but for all that she was his wedded wife. No act of man's could ever part the two whom God himself had joined together by the solemn ties of marriage. She would tell him that.

The long hours dragged themselves slowly by as she sat at the moonlit window. At length the house was still. Darkness wrapped it in a mantle of gloom. The midnight hour sounded from some far-off belfry.

Doris rose to her feet, glided to her chamber door, and softly opened it, stepping out into the corridor.

"May Heaven help me!" she moaned. "This action is the turning point of my life."

Then she walked swiftly down the dark corridor without one glance behind her.

CHAPTER XVI.

"ONLY KEEP MY SECRET."

Stealthily as a shadow Doris flitted out into the dimly lighted corridor. Her face flushed, her hands burned, her heart beat wildly, her brain seemed on fire. She must know the truth. She could bear sorrow and this cruel despair no longer. She must know the worst.

Her slippered feet made no sound on the thick, velvet carpet as she hurried along. Suddenly a hand was laid on her shoulder, and the voice of Beatrix Thornton exclaimed in astonishment:

"Why, Miss Carlisle, what are you doing here so late?"

And as she spoke, Trixy threw open the library door before which they stood, and a flood of light streamed out upon Doris's white, startled face.

Trixy's question had been so abrupt it almost took her breath away; but she recovered something like composure almost the next moment, however.

"I was restless; I could not sleep; so I came down to the library for a book," she faltered. She did not add that she knew it was Frederick Thornton's custom to spend long hours here after the family had retired, and she expected to find him here to-night.

"That is my case exactly," laughed Trixy. "Come in, and I will help you select a good book."

Trembling with suppressed excitement, Doris followed her into the library, casting her eyes eagerly about the room as she crossed the threshold. She saw that he whom she was in search of was not there.

"You should not sit up reading and loose your beauty sleep to-night, above all other nights, for to-morrow night is our ball, you know. Some of the handsomest young gentlemen in New York will be present. Take care some of them do not carry away your heart, Miss Carlisle. If I were a handsome young man, instead of a girl, I should fall straightway in love with you. Why, what are you blushing so for?" cried Trixy. "Don't you like to talk about love and lovers?"

"No," replied Doris, in a low, distressed voice, tears filling her deep blue eyes. "If you please, Trixy, I'd rather not talk of such things."

"You are certainly an odd girl," laughed Trixy,

heartily. "Why, do you know, all the handsome young gentlemen hereabouts have fallen deeply in love with you, and have just been besieging both Isabel and Gwendolin for an introduction to you? Every one takes you for a guest of the house, instead of mamma's companion."

No laughing rejoinder came from Doris's lips. There was an anxious look in her eyes. Ah! this, then, accounted for the growing coldness with which the two sisters greeted her.

"You do not seem enough interested to even ask who they are," said Trixy, disappointedly.

How little she knew that the girl's heart and soul were bound up in her own handsome brother Frederick.

Ah, how poor Doris's heart longed for sympathy and consolation. Oh, if she only dared tell Beatrix Thornton the great hidden sorrow that seemed eating her heart away! She felt that she must unburden her heart to some one, or it must surely break.

"Trixy," she said, faintly, locking and unlocking her little hands nervously, "I could never love any one in this world again. I loved once. It was the sweetest, yet the most bitter experience of my life. The one who vowed always to love me, cruelly cast me from him. Yet, I love him still with all my

heart. Do not talk to me of love or lovers, Trixy. I cannot bear it. The world will never hold but one face for me; and that is the face of him who is lost to me forever."

"Oh, how delightfully romantic!" cried Beatrix. "I said to myself over and over again that there was some mystery in your life. I have seen such strange shadows in your eyes; and your voice often has the sound of tears in it.

"I do wish I could help you in some way," said Beatrix, thoughtfully. "I'd give the world to set the matter straight for you. What's his name and where does he live?"

"I cannot tell you," faltered Doris, catching her breath with a little dry sob.

"Oh, dear! Then I do not see how I can help you," cried Trixy.

"You cannot," replied Doris. "Only keep my secret for me."

"I will," answered Beatrix, earnestly.

And as they parted Trixy resolved in her own mind to bring this truant lover back to Doris; but the first and most important step was to discover his name.

While she stood in the doorway of the library, by a sudden impulse Doris turned and glided back to her side.

"Every one is so cold and cruel to me. I think I should die, if I were to lose your friendship, Beatrix," she said, pantingly.

"You will never die, then, if you wait for that event to transpire," laughed Trixy. "When I like a person I like them for all time. I never could pretend a friendship I did not feel. Why, the first moment I saw you I felt strangely attracted toward you, I could not tell why."

She wondered why Doris caught her hands in her own and kissed them so passionately, while burning tears fell from her eyes.

Poor Doris! If she had only confided in Beatrix —reckless, impulsive, warm-hearted Bee—it might have been better for her.

"Beatrix," she whispered, wistfully, "no matter what you might hear of me in the future—no matter what fate might tempt me to do—promise me, Bee, you of all the world will believe in me; you will not lose your faith in me." Oh, how hollow and unnatural the sweet voice sounded! "There are pitiful secrets in many lives," she went on, "that drive those who are forced to keep them locked in their breasts, to the very verge of madness in their woe. If there is any pity in your heart for me, Beatrix, pray for me. My feet are on the edge of a terrible precipice."

In after years Beatrix Thornton, in recalling that incident, never forgot the haunted look of despair that crossed poor, hapless Doris's face as the words broke from her lips in a piteous cry.

"I will see Frederick to-morrow," thought Doris, as she hurried back to her own room.

But when the morrow came there was so much going on at the villa she could find no opportunity. A dozen times or more Frederick Thornton passed the slight girlish figure with the dark face and the haunting blue eyes, with a careless nod, a smile, or a pleasant word. He did not look closely at her, or he would have observed that she clutched her little hands tightly over her heart, and swayed slightly from side to side, as though she were about to faint.

That afternoon there was a long and anxious consultation between Mrs. Thornton and her two daughters as to the propriety of allowing Miss Carlisle—the paid companion—to attend the ball.

"She has worked so hard for it," said Mrs. Thornton, "I do not see how we can refuse. She will naturally expect it."

"No matter what she expects, mamma," returned Gwendolin, flushing angrily. "We are not obliged to consult her wishes. Why, with a face like hers she would be the belle of the ball. It is not once in

a lifetime one comes across such a startling face—so rare in style, so perfect in contour."

"If mamma cares to see a paid companion outshine her own daughters, she will allow her to be present; if she studies our interest, she will decline," cut in Isabel. "There is no denying the fact that she would eclipse us if we were foolish enough to allow her to appear. All of my gentlemen acquaintances are beginning to rave over her already. I wish to the bottom of my heart that girl had never entered this house. I fear she will bring trouble in the end."

A little later Doris entered the boudoir. Mrs. Thornton turned to her with a forced smile.

"You do not know how sorry we are; there will be such a crowd at the ball I find it impossible to ask you, Miss Carlisle."

"I did not expect it," said Doris, quietly; but for the first time she felt like rebelling bitterly against her fate—against the lot that condemned her to obscurity where she should have shone.

Her handsome young husband would be there; so would Vivian. Ah! if she could but have sat in the ball-room and watched them—could have kept them apart by any strategy.

Doris was in her room when the carriages commenced to roll up to the broad piazza and deposit

their loads of youth and beauty. A ball at Thornton villa was always a success, the rooms were so superb, long and lofty. What would have been a crowd in other places was only a pleasant number there; and this ball promised to be one of the best given.

Doris told herself at first that she would remain in her own room while the grand ball was in progress; then the great curiosity to see how Vivian Courtney looked, and to see, if possible, if she danced with Frederick Thornton, urged her to go down.

With her heart in a whirl, Doris stole down the broad stairway to the corridor below, where she would have a good view of the ball-room beyond, being herself unseen. How her heart throbbed and her face flushed as she listened to the music, as she took up her position behind a marble Clytie which stood behind a pedestal of blush-red roses. The grand ball room, the reception room, the drawing rooms and parlors were thronged with a gay and brilliant assemblage. Ah, what a picture it made! —beautiful faces, flashing jewels, the gleam of satin and silks, tall men and fair-faced women! How the light fell on them! how the warm, perfumed air stirred gently as they passed!

Suddenly the air seemed to stifle Doris. Passing

so near her that she could have put out her hand and touched them from her place of concealment, she beheld Frederick Thornton and Vivian—Vivian radiant in white lace and blush-roses, leaning upon his arm. He was escorting her to the ball room.

"You will remember, Vivian," she heard him say, as he bent his dark, handsome head nearer the beauty, "you are to save most of the waltzes for me; promise me beforehand."

"That would be unfair," she declared.

"It would be just and kind," he answered, eagerly. "I could not endure to see any one else waltzing with you, dear; I should be tempted to take you from him."

The next instant there was a loud crash. The marble Clytie had fallen from the pedestal to the floor; the crimson roses that had been twined about it were scattered in all directions, and amid the debris of roses lay a young girl.

"Why, it is Miss Carlisle, your mother's companion!" cried Vivian, in dismay. "Look, she has fainted."

"Step into the drawing-room while I take her up to mother's apartments," he said to Vivian; and without waiting to summon a servant, he raised the slight figure in his strong arms and bore her rapidly up the broad stairway.

Then for the first time—in the bright, glowing light of the chandeliers—he looked curiously down into the dark, dimpled face lying against his arm—looked—then came to a sudden halt, a cold perspiration starting out in great beads on his forehead.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PANGS OF JEALOUSY.

Frederick Thornton gazed with painful intensity into the girl's beautiful face.

"Just such a face has haunted me in my dreams," he muttered, hoarsely. "I have a dim recollection of having seen such a face before, but where I cannot imagine. Since that accident, which nearly cost me my life, there seem to be strange leaks in my brain.

"It must be only fancy that I have seen this girl before. How strangely my heart thrilled as I touched her hand, like an electric shock. She is a beautiful little creature. If my heart were not already Vivian's, I—I—should be in danger of losing it. My mother's young companion is certainly charming."

He laid his lovely burden down upon the velvet divan in his mother's boudoir, and rang the bell for one of the servants.

"Miss Carlisle has fainted, Patty," he said to the maid who soon made her appearance in answer to his summons. "I will leave her in your charge."

He had scarcely closed the door behind him ere Doris's blue eyes fluttered open.

"Leave me, Patty," she cried, as she raised her eyes to the anxious face bending over her. "You can do nothing for me. Nothing."

And when she was left alone, she turned her face to the wall with moans piteous to hear.

It never occurred to her to inquire how she came there.

She quite believed one of the servants had brought her here when they found her lying in a a dead faint in the corridor below.

The sweet, joyous strains of the dance music and gay laughter floated up to her as she lay there, with her face buried in the pillow. Should she lie there in such wretched abandon while Vivian, the beauty, and Frederick danced and laughed the hours away so gayly down below in the rose-embowered ball-room?

No, no; she *could* not. It would drive her mad.

Silently Doris rose from the divan and crept

down into the corridor again. As she passed the conservatory, glancing in, she saw the two for whom she was searching standing by the fountain.

"Should she turn away, or walk in and face them?" Doris asked herself.

She could not; she would not bear it. She was deadly sick and faint with the bitterest pain of jealousy that could burn or stab a human heart. She could not endure to see Frederick Thornton bend his handsome head over Vivian.

He was hers—her husband—not Vivian's. It was hard and cruel. Her face flushed hotly, and her lips quivered.

She felt that she must cry out to them, that she must say:

"Oh, Frederick, my love, leave her and come and comfort me, or I shall go mad!"

Should she cross over to Vivian's side, and cry out, bitterly:

"He is not yours! Do not look at him or smile at him! Cease to try to win him! He is mine, not yours! He can never be yours, for he has married me!"

The impulse was so strong to utter the words that Doris bit her lips until the pain became insupportable.

She saw on the face of her lovely rival a look

Vivian's face had never worn before. What was he saying to her that brought those blushes to her cheeks and the glad, swift smile into her dazzling dark eyes? Dare he—who was not free to woo and win Vivian—dare he breathe to her one word of love?

Doris knew that she ought to go; that it was an intrusion on her part to remain, but she could not tear herself away. The blood was boiling in her veins, her heart was beating fast.

At that moment a waltz struck up again, and with a smile Frederick drew Vivian's little gloved hand through his arm and led her back to the ball-room by another door.

And Doris crept close to a great branching magnolia near the entrance and watched them. Vivian seemed to float through the mazes of the graceful waltz like a veritable fairy.

Doris did not take her eyes from her husband and Vivian, her beautiful rival, no matter in what part of the ball-room they happened to be.

She saw Frederick hold close to his heart his fair partner, and it seemed to Doris's distorted imagination that he held her more closely than the occasion demanded.

At last—oh! deliverance from torture!—the music ceased; the waltz was over, Frederick offered

Vivian his arm then, and they promenaded around the room.

"I should go away from here," muttered Doris, as she watched them. "Ah! my curse is that I love him. I could not live away from him. I love him with the bitterest love—a thousand times more cruel than hate."

While she stood there Mrs. Thornton approached. She saw Doris and stopped short. The pallor on the girl's face startled her.

"You do not look well, Miss Carlisle," she said, gently. "Had you not better go into the grounds and walk awhile in the cool air, or go up to your room and rest? I shall not need you any more to-night; you look tired."

Then Mrs. Thornton caught sight of her son and Vivian. She turned to Doris with a pleased smile.

"What a handsome couple they make," she said, —"my son and Vivian—do they not, Miss Carlisle?"

Doris tried to murmur some answer, but her voice died away on her white lips.

"The dearest wish of my heart will be gratified when I see them married," Mrs. Thornton went on.

A sudden impulse, an irresistible, mad longing, urged her to turn to Frederick's mother, and say: "He can never marry that proud beauty; he is

DORIS IN HER NEW DISGUISE.—*See Chapter X.*

already married. I am his wife." But this was neither the time nor the place for such revelation.

Without waiting for Doris to reply, Mrs. Thornton moved on, and Doris resumed her patient watch again.

Some one had claimed Vivian for a quadrille, and Doris noticed with bitter pain that Frederick did not attempt to seek another partner. He stood quite alone where she had left him. Of what was he thinking that he looked so dreamily at the programme he held! Was he thinking of that other ball, and the young girl who had accompanied him there, to her bitter cost? Was he thinking of the pitiful sequel that had followed on the heels of it? Doris imagined he was, and again that old perplexing question recurred to her: Why had he wedded her, if he meant to desert her? Would any one, looking into his dark, handsome face, believe he could be guilty of so cruelly deserting the bride he had married, almost at the very altar? She remembered the words of the great poet, who has said:

"That one may smile, and smile, and be villain."

Did he have no thought of the young heart he had broken, the young life he had blasted?

"If he could have but loved her, how different life might have been for her," she told herself. "He

does not love me; he cares only for Vivian," she murmured. "If I died to-morrow," she cried, with a bitter moan, "who would grieve for me? Not Frederick Thornton. If he heard I was dead, it would be a great relief to him. He could look up calmly, and say: 'She is out of my way forever.' If he did not *say* it, that is the thought that would flt through his mind.

"God forgive me! I do not want to be wicked, but I think Heaven has laid a great curse upon my life. I am cursed by fate. I was so lonely, my childhood and girlhood were so unhappy; my one prayer to Heaven was to send me some one who would love me. I had no gentle mother, no loving sister, no kind father—no kindred on the great, wide, cruel earth. I was so desolate I craved love —only love—and it has been denied me. What is there left to live for? He will never, *never* love me!"

As she watched, she saw Frederick cross to where Vivian sat, and bend over her a moment. Then she rose, took his arm, and together they passed out of the ball-room into the moonlit, rose-bordered terrace.

The poor wretched young wife stood motionless beside the crimson clove carnations, her hands

pressed tightly over her heart. Should she follow them or not?

The temptation was more than she could resist. Silently as a shadow Doris stole after them, gaining the terrace by another door. They had wandered down the beach-walk to the river's brink. Doris could see the glimmer of Vivian's white dress through the trees as the patches of moonlight fell upon it. There was such a deep silence among the trees, as she went swiftly along, that it seemed to Doris that they were waiting, silent, motionless, for the pitiful scene which was to follow. Sometimes the low, musical laughter of Vivian reached her, and then the rich ring of her husband's voice would sound cheerily through the still, white starlight; and all the time she, his wife, was slowly threading her way after him like the shadow of fate.

Doris had a dim idea that what she was doing was a wrong, undignified, ungenerous action; but her great, hopeless, pitiful love, and the cruel smart of jealousy, more bitter to bear than the pangs of death, outweighed every other feeling.

"I shall see for myself whether it is true or not that he is Vivian's lover, that he contemplates marrying her."

She had a faint remembrance of reading once of a man who had applied to the law to free him from

his wife. What the cause was she did not recollect; and it seemed strange to Doris, at the time, that the law freed him; that the law of man could set at defiance the law of God, that those joined together in holy wedlock should never be put asunder.

Had Frederick Thornton availed himself of any such means to free himself from her that he might wed Vivian, whom he loved?

"If it is so, let me hear it from his own lips," she murmured, hoarsely; better that he should slay her with the truth at once than that she should die by this most slow and cruel torture.

Silently Doris drew near the two standing on the sands together, all unconscious of her presence, and the tragedy which was to follow. Only a group of trees separated her from them, but Doris crept still closer, with bated breath and a heart on fire.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DORIS AND FREDERICK MEET.

Nearer, still nearer, crept the little dark figure to the two who stood by the river's brink, gazing far out on the moonlit waves.

What were they saying? Was Frederick telling his beautiful companion the story of that other ball, and the fatal marriage that had resulted from it?

Was he saying that, on the impulse of the moment, he had encumbered himself with a wife he did not love? No, no; he had not told her yet; for, crouching there in the dense shadow, she heard Vivian say:

"There seems to be some secret you are trying to keep back from me, Frederick. You are changed of late; how, or why, I cannot tell. Sometimes, when I am talking to you, you do not hear me. Where are your thoughts—of whom are you thinking? I ask myself. If I thought you cared for any one else, Frederick, I—"

The sentence never was finished. Frederick Thornton bent his dark, handsome face with a light, happy, careless laugh.

"My dear Vivian," he cried, "is it possible you are growing jealous?" In the next instant he had changed his light, bantering tone. "It is all your imagination about the change in me, as you call it. When you see me distrait, it is when I am trying to recall some vague thought that seems to have escaped my mind, and which is ever eluding my memory. As for caring for any one else—ah, no, Vivian, you are my first and only love. I have never cared for any one but you. I have never

held any one else's hands clasped in mine as I am holding yours now. I have never breathed one word—nay—never given one thought to another."

Was it a moan from human lips that startled them, or only the wind sighing through the trees, dying away in a low wail over the water? The words Doris had heard had driven her mad. Oh, God, how could he utter words as false as these? How dared he? It was a wonder that the rod of the angels did not strike him dead.

With a bitter cry Doris sprang from her place of concealment and confronted him. There was a shriek from Vivian, and a cry of surprise from Frederick.

"Miss Carlisle!" they both echoed in a breath.

"No—not—Miss Carlisle!" Doris panted, with the most broken-hearted cry that ever fell from human lips—"not Miss Carlisle, but Doris Thornton, the wretched, unhappy wife of this man who dares to speak to you of love, Vivian Courtney!—the unhappy bride whom Frederick Thornton wedded, and then deserted at the very altar almost!"

Another shriek fell from Vivian's lips. Frederick Thornton stood still in the path like one turned to stone. Speech and action seemed suddenly to have left him. He could not have moved a muscle, ut-

tered one word if his life had depended upon it; the shock he had received was so terrible—so appalling.

"It is false! Who are you who dare utter such words? Why do you not deny it, Frederick?" screamed Vivian, turning to him, and eagerly scanning his pale, handsome face in the white, cold moonlight.

"Because he dare not, in the presence of God and the listening angels, who witnessed our marriage," replied Doris, solemnly, lifting her white right hand to the star-gemmed heavens, and answering Vivian's last question first. "As to who I am, your woman's penetration might have told you that I am the unhappy girl whom you once knew as Doris Brandon, in those old days at Madame Delmar's seminary."

"*You* Doris Brandon! Why, you are certainly mad!" exclaimed Vivian Courtney, hoarsely. "She was fair of face, and hair like golden sunshine. You are dark—"

"Hush! Listen to me for but one moment, and I will explain. Let Frederick Thornton deny me, his deserted bride, then, if he will. In the register of the old gray stone church where that weird, fatal midnight marriage was solemnized, you will find our names signed. There you will find proof.

"You yourself, Vivian, know how and where I

first met Frederick Thornton. It was a dark and bitter hour for me in which you put that note into my hands on the day you were leaving the seminary, and bade me wait for the young man who would come to the old south gate at four that afternoon, and place it in his hands."

Breathless with excitement, Vivian sprang forward.

"It is all false!" she cried, stormily. "Some cruel trick to frighten me!" she went on, vehemently.

Yet, for all that, she noted with dim horror that Frederick did not contradict the horrible assertion.

In a few brief words Doris had panted out her pitiful story of her meeting with Frederick that day, and of the pleasant meetings and rambles through the summer wood that followed. How he had persuaded her to steal out of the seminary and go to the grand ball, and the ill-starred, hasty marriage that had resulted from it. How he had taken her to Baltimore, and leaving her at the hotel, had then and there heartlessly and cruelly deserted her. Of her search for a situation as companion; and of the temptation to enter her husband's home and look once more upon his face that had tempted her to disguise herself and come to his mother.

As he listened, like a shock the past returned to

Frederick Thornton. He tried to speak, but the words died away on his lips, making no sound. The veins stood out like cords on his forehead, and great drops of perspiration stood out in heavy beads on his white face.

Like a flash he remembered all now;—the marriage; leaving Doris, his young bride, at the hotel, and sauntering out into the street to smoke a cigar while she rested; and the accident which had followed that had nearly cost him his life, and which, when he recovered, had left such a strange blank in his mind as to some event or events that had transpired just prior to it, which he had ever since been vainly endeavoring to call to mind. Oh! and this was it! No wonder he was struck dumb with horror as his brain took in the terrible truth.

"Is it true, Frederick?" cried out Vivian, sharply. "Oh, my love! my love! tell me that it is not true, or I shall go mad."

"It is true, Vivian," he murmured, hoarsely; and it almost seemed to him another voice had spoken, it seemed so strange and unnatural. "I married her, as she says. She is my wife."

He tried to say more, but the words refused to leave his lips. He was like a man bewildered—stunned by a swift, terrible, unexpected blow.

"I see it all now," screamed Vivian, with a wild,

eldritch, shrill laugh that made both of her listeners' blood turn cold. "It was a daring scheme for a husband—a most daring plot to win my love from me by stealth," she went on, with stinging sarcasm. "I should never have intrusted my note to you. A beggar like yourself—a nameless nobody—a waif on Madame Delmar's charity—I might have known would manœuvre for a wealthy husband, just as you have done."

She sprang nearer to Doris, white with wrath, her eyes fairly blazing as they rested on the girl who had come between her and Frederick Thornton's love.

"Let it be one bitter drop of disappointment in your cup of triumph to know that the man you have so cunningly entrapped does not nor never will love you, for his heart is mine. Do you hear, Doris Brandon? His heart is mine!"

Her eyes glittered, her cheeks and lips flushed scarlet with excitement.

Frederick Thornton's presence alone saved her from raising her clenched, jeweled hand and striking Doris down at her feet.

Frederick Thornton himself seemed incapable of action. To him Doris turned, holding up her little hands as if to ward off Vivian's scathing accusations.

"Frederick," she cried out, "oh, believe me, all

that she accuses me of is false—all terribly false. I I—would have died sooner than—than try to entrap you into—marrying me."

There was a piteous quiver in the sweet, childish voice, and the soft blue, appealing eyes raised to Frederick Thornton's pale, disturbed, handsome face were drowned in tears. He would have interrupted her, but she held up her hand with a quick gesture.

"Hear me out," she cried. "I have only a few words more to say, but they must be said to you alone, Frederick. I could not speak before her."

Vivian expected that Frederick would put out his hand to her, crying out that she might remain and hear all that was to be said. But he did not; and with a derisive, sneering laugh, she gathered up her silken skirts in her dainty hand and fairly flew up the rose-bordered path to the house, and up to Mrs. Thornton's boudoir, to tell her the horrible story.

It was the most awkward moment of Frederick Thornton's life when he found himself standing alone face to face with Doris.

He meant to tell her that he had never willfully deserted her, and of the frightful accident which had stricken him down, separating him in so strange a manner from his watching, waiting bride, when

she had ceased speaking. First, he must hear what she had to say to him.

"Oh, Mr. Thornton—Frederick!" she faltered, piteously, "you must believe that I never—never—thought of marrying you ten minutes before you spoke of it—proposed it, or I shall die here at your feet, or go mad with very shame. I thought you wished me to marry you—oh, Heaven pity me!—I thought you wished me to marry you because you loved me just as dearly as I had learned to love you; yes, I believed that with all my heart."

The words she had uttered had fallen upon Frederick Thornton like a thunderbolt; they were a startling revelation to him. He looked into the beautiful, childish face aghast. Doris loved him!—Doris whom he had married in a moment of impulse, to save her from being cast adrift on the cold, pitiless world, she feared so much.

He had considered her but a beautiful, willful, capricious child. He was amazed to hear from her lips that revelation she had uttered in her intense excitement—she loved him.

"Oh, if you had but left me to die at the ball," she moaned, "for it was then that my heart went out to you. Oh, if I had but known you did not love me, I would have died sooner than have gone to the altar with you. I never thought that lips could

breathe vows the heart was far from feeling. Heaven forgive you for pledging yourself at the altar to love me, when you knew it was false—all false, for your heart was as far from mine as the sky is from the earth. You loved another."

"Doris, poor little Doris, listen to me!" he cried, eagerly; but she held up that little hand again enjoining silence.

"Those solemn vows bind us to each other until the death of one sets the other free. I am going to give you back your freedom which you bartered away. I will not spoil your life and Vivian's."

She turned and attempted to pass him, but he put out his hand and caught the slender, girlish figure.

"How could you set me free, Doris?" he demanded. "What are you intending to do, my poor child?"

"I am going out into the bitterness of death!" she sobbed, freeing herself, with a shudder, from his detaining clasp. "I am going to set you free. When you remember that, you will not quite hate me."

And with the swiftness of a storm-driven swallow, she sprang from his grasp down the path, and on to the dark flowing river that lay but a few rods beyond.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DESPAIRING GIRL.

The whole affair had been so sudden, the shock which had followed Doris's startling revelation so terrible, that for an instant Frederick Thornton was dazed; and in that instant, the little figure had eluded his grasp, and with the fleetness of a tempest-tossed swallow, flew down the path that led to the river.

"Doris!" he called out, sharply. "Come back! What would you do?"

Only a heart-broken sob floated back to him.

The words she had uttered came to his memory with awful horror:

"Only death could break the bonds that bind you to me, Mr. Thornton. I will not come between you and Vivian. I am going to set you free."

Surely poor, beautiful little Doris did not intend to court death in the dark, rapid river. The thought brought him to his senses as nothing else

could have done, and with fleet footsteps he followed that flying figure, calling upon her to stop.

But if Doris heard those passionate cries she did not heed them. Pausing an instant on the brink of the moonlit water, she held up her white hands to the night-sky.

"It was all a cruel mistake," she murmured, with gasping sobs. "He did not love me. It was Vivian whom he loved. He hates me because I came between them and parted them, and I couldn't bear that. I must die and set him free. Surely, God must pardon me, knowing how bitterly hard my life is to bear—

> "'Mad from life's history,
> Glad to death's mystery
> Swift to be hurled,
> Anywhere—anywhere out of the world.'"

Poor Doris! Her great sorrow had driven her mad with despair. With a quivering, piteous cry that pierced Frederick Thornton's heart like an arrow, as it floated back to him, little Doris flung herself from the rock on which she stood, down into the curling waves; and in an instant they closed over her head.

The next moment Frederick Thornton reached the spot. He stood there as if turned to stone, look-

ing down into the rippling waters, sparkling under the pale light of the moon—the waters that had but a moment before closed over that beautiful, dark head and childish, despairing face.

Horror had almost robbed him of his voice, deprived him of his strength. With an awful cry he staggered back from the brink, and rushed toward the house, crying loudly for help, for she had not risen again.

Poor Doris, the fair young bride he had wedded, and from whom the hand of fate had parted him, almost at the very altar, in so strange a manner, lying cold in death, and for his sake. She had not given him time to tell her how strangely fate had been playing at cross-purposes with them. She believed he had willfully, cruelly deserted her, and it was this that had driven her to her doom. She had sought death ere the startling truth could be revealed to her. Oh, the pity, the horror, and the cruel shame of it!

"Help! help!" he cried, hoarsely, wildly rushing up the broad, marble porch two steps at a time. To the servants, who rushed out in answer to their young master's wild cries, he explained in a few gasping words what had happened.

There would be no question of saving her now, they told him. They could only get drags, and

search for the body. This was quickly done. Steady hands bent to the oars. Rigid and still, and ghastly white, Frederick Thornton sat in the boat beside them, watching it all; sat like a figure wrought in marble; sat with the ghastly, white, despairing face of a man whose thoughts were torturing him to madness. Every rush of the waves that beat against the boat—every stroke of the oars, as they struck against the water, seemed to cry out to him:

"She sought death because she could not live without you. How the poor child loved you!"

The drags were dipped, splashed, and trailed through the shimmering water, only to come up tangled with weeds and river drift. No set, white, childish face, framed in rings of wet hair clinging to it—no slender, girlish figure came up with the drags from the river's depths.

An hour passed in useless search. They were obliged at length to abandon it. The swift undercurrent must have carried her away before they had reached the spot.

And all this time the merry ball was going on. Music, laughter and dancing made the night air echo with revelry, and not one among them knew of the tragedy which had taken place so near them.

Frederick Thornton could not go back to the

scene of festivity. He could not endure it. Like one mad, he paced the river's brink, gazing with horror and remorse too great for words at the fair, false, smiling, treacherous waves.

Suddenly a light, quick, step came hurriedly down the path. He knew before he raised his white, haggard, pain-drawn face that it was Vivian.

"Have you learned what has happened, Vivian?" he asked. "Poor Doris has flung herself into the river. I was powerless to save her, for she never rose again. There was not even a ripple to mark the spot where she went down. She is drowned. Poor pretty Doris! She did it to set me free. Oh, the pity of it, Vivian; the pity of it!"

To the last day of his life Frederick Thornton never forgot the shock it gave him to hear the triumphant cry that broke from Vivian's red lips:

"Dead, is she, Frederick? Was there ever such a fortunate stroke of fate for you and me? I thought I should go mad when I listened to her story and heard it confirmed by your lips. And now she is out of our path forever!"

Frederick Thornton recoiled from Vivian in horror too great for words. Could it be that he had heard aright? Great Heaven! had this girl, whom he had idolized as little less than an angel, a heart of marble, and a breast so dead to human pity

that she could speak of poor little Doris's untimely death like this?

"Vivian!" he cried, sternly, "do you realize that you are speaking of that poor child's death as though you were *glad?*"

"And so I am," assented Vivian Courtney. "Are not you, Frederick?"

"Heaven forbid!" he groaned, shudderingly. "If I could put life into that still heart again and brightness into those dim eyes, I would suffer a lifetime of pain to do it."

Vivian came a step nearer to him and laid her little white hand—on which his engagement ring still sparkled—on his arm. Only a few short hours before that touch would have thrilled him to the heart's core. *Now* he shook it off with a shudder.

"You have forgotten that, if she had lived, she would have come between you and me—and happiness," she murmured.

And the voice that had always sounded like the sweetest music to Frederick Thornton's ears now seemed strangely discordant to him, and the vague thought drifted across his mind, was it possible he had ever loved this girl? Heretofore he had seen only the sweet side of Vivian's nature. Now she stood revealed to him in quite a different light—a vindictive woman; one capable of the most desperate,

relentless hate; one who could glory in an innocent rival's death—the loss of a human life—if it removed an obstacle from her path. He was amazed—cruelly disappointed in Vivian Courtney.

The chances are, if Vivian had not given utterance to her real sentiments, the whole course of her after life would have been different. A slight incident, a word, a look, have often been known to turn the mightiest love into abhorrence. Love comes to the heart swiftly, and it may take wing just as swiftly, and is often but a transient guest. But, feeling so sure of Frederick's love, Vivian went on:

"Yes, I am glad Doris has made way with herself. How we would have hated her if she had lived to spoil our lives. She was always a designing, artful minx when she was at school. Of course she purposely remained until past the hour for the gates to be locked, to entrap you into marrying her—the crafty—"

"Vivian!—Miss Courtney!—remember you are speaking of the dead!" exclaimed Frederick Thornton, sternly. "Do not speak another disparaging word of that poor child if you would have me retain the respect in which I have always held you. Remember—she was—my—wife."

Vivian took a step backward, and looked at his pale, angry face.

"One would almost imagine that you were as much in love with the pretty little beggar as she was with you," she cried; "and that you had just discovered that smoldering love existed in your heart when her unexpected taking off awakened it into life."

She had put the idea into his head, and he caught at the thought with strange eagerness. Was the great pain at his heart the quivering, mighty throb of love? He covered his face with his hands with a deep groan.

The consciousness of the truth came home to Frederick Thornton too late. He *loved* little Doris, the pretty, trembling young bride whom he had wedded, and from whom fate had parted him so strangely.

The mighty thrill that had stirred his pulses as he saw her kneeling, with her golden head bowed, on the cold, hard stones outside of the closed gates, crying out she would rather die than face the pitiless world—the mighty thrill that had stirred his pulses and bade him care for her—instead of pity, as he thought it then, was *love*. Love, too, that had prompted him to follow her to-night down to the river, to give his life, if need be, to save her. Love that bemoaned her loss, and cried out to him that his life was ruined and blasted, now that Doris was

no more; and the bitterest drop in his cup of woe was the knowledge that Doris loved him so well, and that she had died because she could not live without him, and had died, too, believing he had willfully deserted her.

Ah! if she had but known just how that terrible affair came about.

Again Vivian broke in upon his perturbed thoughts.

"You do not speak! You do not attempt to deny it!" she cried, shrilly. "I believe you did love the girl, or you would never, never have asked her to marry you that night of the ball; and if that be true, I glory in the fact that you are parted from her—that she is dead!"

Great Heaven! how the cruel words smote him! and in that moment he loathed Vivian more intensely than he had ever loved her.

"As the case now stands, Vivian," he said, coldly, "I release you from your engagement, realizing under what circumstances it was made."

"But, supposing I do not wish to be released," she said, slowly.

"We can never be anything to each other in the future," he answered, firmly. "All is over between us, Vivian; we must part forever."

CHAPTER XX.

A HUSBAND'S FAULT.

Mrs. Thornton's dismay upon hearing the startling story Vivian related so incoherently to her can better be imagined than described.

She sought out her son at once. He was still pacing to and fro under the beeches in the garden.

"Frederick," she whispered, approaching him and taking his cold hands in her own, "you must not give way to grief like this. Under the circum stances, you are blameless. That accident, and the delirious fever which followed it, completely obliterated all knowledge of your waiting bride from your mind. The fault lay with Doris herself. When she came here, why did she not tell me all, instead of creeping into the house by stealth, and in disguise? Or why did she not confront you, and demand to know why you deserted her? Then matters could have been righted."

"She was so young, mother, she did not know what to do under the complicated circumstances. She believed, of course, that I was false to her," he groaned.

"There is another matter of which I wish to speak, Frederick," said his mother, timidly. "This is scarcely the time and place, still it must be said, sooner or later, and the subject may as well be gotten over with first as last.

"You married this girl on the spur of the moment, my boy, and even at the time you did not love her—you loved Vivian. Believing yourself afterward free to woo and win Vivian, you became engaged in marriage to her. The wedding day is set; she wears your ring upon her finger. You cannot bring Doris back; therefore it is best to keep all knowledge of this tragedy from the public, and let your marriage with Vivian go on."

She was puzzled by the strange look that crossed his face, leaving it paler than ever.

"I will keep this pitiful affair from the world's knowledge for my poor, unhappy Doris's sake, if you think best, mother," he answered, huskily; "but as for marrying Vivian now, mother, I cannot. Do not urge me. *I cannot.*"

Mrs. Thornton looked into her son's white, handsome, stormy face with dismay, not unmixed with

fear. Was this terrible affair driving him mad? Was he losing his reason? He was evincing an unaccountable, strange dislike toward Vivian whom he had fairly idolized. Surely this was a sign of it. Those struggling on the verge of madness usually turn against the one they love best—first.

"Do not talk about it any more, mother," he went on, huskily. "I cannot bear it."

Every effort was made to find poor Doris's body, but to no avail.

If she lay beneath the water, the sunlit waves kept their own secret well. The disappearance of Mrs. Thornton's companion created no excitement whatever. No one missed her, on one took any interest to know what had become of her; and thus days lengthened into weary months. At last society was beginning to wonder why the marriage between Vivian Courtney, the heiress, and Frederick Thornton, the banker's son, did not take place.

Since the night of the ball many had noticed a sudden and growing coldness between the lovers.

No one knew that, seeing Vivian in her true light —on that fatal night she had boldly declared her hatred of poor, hapless little Doris—the last remnant of Frederick Thornton's love for her had been turned into loathing.

He no longer sought Vivian's society; he rather

avoided it. Whole hours he spent by the deep, dark, treacherous water, his face buried in his hands, groaning aloud. It was too late now for vain regrets. His heart had gone out to poor little Doris too late.

No one knew how he mourned in secret for the bride he had lost so strangely.

To Vivian Courtney this strange revulsion on the part of her lover was maddening. In vain she tried to woo him back to his allegiance; but the golden spell of love was broken. He shrank from her. The dead coals of the old love were never again to be re-kindled in his heart.

Yet Vivian Courtney would not be discouraged. Even to herself she would not admit the alarming truth that Frederick Thornton's heart had grown cold to her.

One afternoon matters came to a crisis. Vivian drove up to the villa in her village-cart and called for Frederick.

"I should like you to ride a little way with me, Frederick," she said. "I have something to say to you."

Very reluctantly he complied, rather dreading a tete-a-tete with the willful beauty, and a shade of annoyance crossed his face which she was not slow in perceiving. For some distance they rode in

silence—a silence broken only by the twittering of the birds in the trees overhead, or the drowsy hum of the bees amid the sweet pink clover.

At length the silence became irksome to Vivian. She clutched the reins tightly with her little, white, ungloved hands; and looking down he noticed that she still wore his engagement ring.

She saw the glance, and a deep flush, followed by a quick pallor, spread over her face.

"Frederick," she said, in a low, vibrating voice, "it is about this ring I wish to speak to you. Do you still mean what you said on the night of the ball?"

It hurt her pride cruelly to utter those words, but she *must* know. Her love—her whole future—was at stake.

He tried to overcome his embarrassment at the question, but it was a failure. He looked greatly distressed. He was a thorough gentleman in word and deed. How could he tell her that his heart had changed toward her since the evening she had expressed herself so freely in regard to poor little Doris's death? How he hated the ungracious words he must speak; yet it must be done. He must speak plainly to her. The words he must utter: "I have ceased to love you," seemed to him

most unmanly; yet the sooner they understood each other the better it would be for them both.

In the gentlest words he could command, he told her that the engagement they had entered into should never have existed, owing to the fact that, at that time, he was not free to woo and win any young girl's heart, and he begged her to remember the accident which had befallen him, followed by brain fever, which had obliterated from his mind all knowledge of his bride, who awaited his return.

"No, no, Vivian," he went on, "do not consider your promise binding, for *I* do not. You are as free as air."

The words died away on his lips as he saw the marble white pallor of the girl's face. Her eyes glowed like purple fires, and her breast heaved convulsively.

"You have no heart, or you would not break with me!" she sobbed. "All the world will know that I am a victim to the fickleness of a man's love!" she cried. "You did love me once, Frederick," she went on, pathetically, "and you would have been mine, but for that girl who came between us, and I hate her for it; yes, hate her in her grave, for I believe in one mad moment, as she stood before you, pleading her cause that night, your

love turned from me to her. Is it not so?" she panted.

He was too honorable to deny the truth, and he bowed his head in assent.

Again Vivian laid aside her pride, and turned to him.

"Is it too late, now that she is dead, to care—for me—again?" she faltered.

He could not help feeling touched with pity and distress for the humiliation it must have cost this proud girl to speak such words as these.

"If you ever marry I—I shall despise the woman who wins your love," she cried, bitterly; "I will be her cruelest enemy, and yours, till the day I die."

"Calm yourself, Vivian," he answered, gently, taking her burning hands in his; "I shall never marry—never."

"You will wreck your life and mine for a foolish vagary," she cried, bitterly. "Doris is dead—why can you not forget her, Frederick?" she cried, with a spasm of pain in her voice. "Pause and think before you give up such a deathless love as mine."

He shook his head with a sad gesture.

"I am grieved, pained to tell you, Vivian," he said, "that it can never be; the memory of my fair young bride comes between us. My heart

has gone out to Doris, and is buried with her in her grave."

"Shall we turn back?" she asked, in a cold, constrained voice, that sounded scarcely human.

"Yes," he answered, gently.

Not a word was uttered during that long drive homeward. Vivian's face was white as death, but with a firm hand she held the reins.

Before alighting from the vehicle, he held out his hand to her:

"We can at least be friends, Vivian," he said, appealingly.

She uttered a bitter laugh that was half a sob, recoiling from his outstretched hand.

"After breaking my heart, and placing me in a very sorry light before the public, do not talk of being friends with me; do not ask me to touch your hand."

"As you think best, Vivian," he said, humbly.

Vivian Courtney never saw the green, waving fields, the white, pebbled road, and the daisy-starred meadows as she drove slowly homeward. Vivian was in a whirl of emotion: she was trying to picture what life would be without him.

"Oh, my love!" she sobbed, "will you never care for me? Shall I wait for you all my life long? Shall I call, and hear but the echo of my own voice?

Shall I love you year after year, and be no nearer to you than I am now? Oh, Frederick, if it be in the power of woman to win you, I will win you—I will devote my life to the task."

And then and there she made this vow which influenced her future life, and made of it one long tragedy.

She vowed that she would win his love—or no other woman should—that her beauty, and the gifts nature had lavished upon her, should all be used for this one purpose. Even as she had had undying love, so she would have undying patience. She would never weary; she would bear all his coldness with gentleness, but she would win him in the end; it might be long years, but she would win his love, or no other woman should.

Over and over she repeated those words vehemently to herself, until that one idea was the one purpose of her life. The next day society was considerably shocked by the announcement that the engagement between handsome Frederick Thornton and Vivian Courtney, the beautiful heiress, was broken.

Vivian's father heard the report confirmed by his daughter's lips, with a face white with rage.

"He has gone too far with this matter to draw back now, Vivian," he cried. "He *must*—he *shall*

live up to every letter of his agreement, or he will answer to me, your father, for it."

In all her life Vivian had never seen her father so terribly moved, or worked up into such a terrible passion.

He strode toward the door and flung it open, taking something bright and gleaming from his desk as he passed it, and thrusting it into his breast-pocket.

"What would you do, father?" cried Vivian, springing toward him and catching his arm in the wildest alarm.

"I am going to see that he marries you *this very day*, according to contract,—or gives me satisfaction!" he thundered.

CHAPTER XXI.

DISOWNED.

We must now return to Doris and the fatal moment in which she plunged madly from the rocks down into the swirling water below.

The contact with the water brought Doris to her senses and the realization that she had no right to

take the life God had given her. When she rose to the surface, it was in the dark, dense shadows of the willows that fringed the bank.

Clutching the long branches that drooped to the water's edge, Doris succeeded in drawing herself into safety.

"May God forgive me," she murmured again, falling upon her knees. "I think for the moment I must have been mad—yes, driven mad by my terrible woe."

Kneeling there, she heard Frederick Thornton wildly calling upon her name. A low, bitter laugh that was half a sob fell from her lips, then she knew no more.

For long hours Doris lay among the daisy studded grass in the dense shadow of the trees, her white stark face upturned to the night sky. Surely the pitying moonbeams, drifting down through the swaying branches, never looked upon a sadder sight in all their rounds.

At length consciousness returned to her. For a moment she was stunned, bewildered. Then the low wash of the river as it laved the banks brought a remembrance of what had transpired to her and how she came to be lying there.

Doris struggled to her feet and stood irresolute for a moment in the path. Where should she go?

Which way should she turn? "It does not matter much," she murmured, and again she turned her white, despairing face to the great city.

"Cast adrift again on the streets of New York," she moaned. "Ah! well, I will look my cruel fate bravely in the face. I will teach my heart to forget him. I will tear his image out of my heart, though it take a lifetime. I shall never cross his path again—never! From this hour I leave the old life behind me."

The light broke, the sun rose, and another day was begun in the bustling city of New York, toward which poor, beautiful, hapless Doris, the child of fate, had turned her steps.

The same sun which had crossed the zenith was shining just then upon a strange scene which was transpiring in the far-off village of Beech Grove on the Chesapeake.

An hour before, a magnificent equipage had entered the village, and the driver had stopped one of the pedestrians, and inquired the way to Madame Delmar's seminary.

The carriage contained a lady and gentleman. Both were greatly agitated, though the gentleman did his best to soothe his companion.

"As we draw near the seminary gates, my heart

beats so tumultuously, I almost fear it will break, Hulbert," she said, smiling through her tears.

"Joy never kills, my dear Dora," he replied. "Calm yourself, darling."

"How can you talk of being calm, Hulbert," she cried, "when I have been looking forward to this moment for nearly eighteen years? It has haunted me in my dreams, been ever present in my waking hours. My one prayer to Heaven has been, Heaven hasten the hour in which I am to meet my child, and clasp her once more in her mother's loving arms."

"Doris must have grown into a beautiful young girl," said the gentleman, thoughtfully. "She has your features, my dear."

"Will she meet me with a glad cry of love, or with coldness, I wonder?" murmured the lady. "It must have been a great cross to her never to have known her parents; and the knowledge that she had been forsaken in her infancy by those who should have been her protectors. Poor little Doris!—my pretty little, golden-haired baby!" And the lady commenced to weep afresh.

"You forget, Dora, it was done for the best—the very best," said Hulbert Brandon, a look of pain crossing his noble face. "You forget that our history—our past—has been no common one—our romantic meeting and hasty, secret marriage, and

our dismay at finding out there had been the bitterest kind of a feud existing between our families for years. You were obliged to keep the birth of our child, as well as our marriage, a secret from them, telling them you were visiting friends during those months.

"I will never forget how we met in secret at the park gate one night; how they discovered us standing there together, and tore you from my arms. They took you abroad, keeping you abroad long years; and in disguise I followed, and was always near you. We would have been happy, even under these disadvantages, if we had but had our child with us.

"You felt more contented when the nurse wrote you that she had placed the child at Madame Delmar's, and you received her letters regularly for years that she was watching the child faithfully from afar; and that Doris, who was known as madame's ward, was growing up into a beautiful young girl.

"Now, after all these years, death has dissolved these bonds which bound us to secrecy, and we can acknowledge the marriage which was solemnized eighteen years ago at last."

"And, hurrying here, we find the old nurse passed away two months ago," sighed Mrs. Brandon.

"That is why her letters ceased to come. But we will speak no more of the sad topic. What a joyful future we will have, Hulbert. We will take our daughter to our beautiful home, and surround her with every luxury wealth can purchase and love lavish upon her. How well we shall love her to make up for these long years of enforced separation. Little Doris will be quite an heiress, too—heiress to a million. I hope it will not make the child proud."

Hulbert Brandon pressed his wife's hand. At that moment the carriage turned an abrupt curve in the steep road, and the towers and gables of the grim stone building, with the gilt letters, "Madame Delmar's Seminary," burst upon their view.

The lady trembled with agitation as her husband assisted her to alight, and led her through the great arched gateway up the lilac-bordered path that led to the broad marble steps of the entrance.

A tidy maid answered the summons and showed the visitors into the reception room.

"They preferred not to send you their card," said the girl to madame, in delivering their message. "They said—"

Madame cut the maid short.

"No cards! Humph! Inferior people, most likely." And a dark frown settled on her face at being awakened from her mid-day siesta.

"Indeed, they're not, madame," declared the maid. "The lady is a real lady, with a silk dress on as stiff as a board and diamonds on as big as partridge eggs."

Madame Delmar walked down the stairs with a feeling of curiosity.

"Why did they not send up their cards?" she wondered.

Opening the door and entering with a stately mien, she found herself in the presence of her visitors.

She took in at a glance the elegance and quality of the lady's apparel—the diamonds that sparkled like suns, that depended from her shell-like ears and on her dainty white hands. Madame Delmar saw that the gentleman was stately and of commanding presence—evidently a thorough gentleman, and wealthy.

The wife was looking into madame's face, her own face turning from red to white.

There never was a grimmer sight than Madame Delmar presented as she advanced to greet them. She was rigidly upright, as one encased in strong whalebone; there was not one bend in her. Her hair was iron-gray, drawn straight back from her temples into a little knot at the back of her head; her dress was iron-gray, ill made, ill fitting, with big horn

buttons down the terribly long, straight waist that ended in a welting cord just where the too ample skirt began.

A sudden fear filled Mrs. Brandon's anxious heart. Did her beautiful little Doris have a happy life of it here with this grim, austere madame?

In a few, brief words Hulbert Brandon told his story—the story that seemed more like a weird romance than reality to madame's astounded ears.

"My dear Hulbert, ask madame to send for Doris to come to us at once!" cried Mrs. Brandon, excitedly. "Don't you see the moments are like hours to me? I must see my child."

And, with a heart throbbing almost as painfully as his wife's, Mr. Brandon asked that Doris might be brought to them without a moment's unnecessary delay.

"I am a wealthy man," he said, with emotion. "I will make you a rich woman for life for the care you have bestowed upon our little Doris."

They both saw Madame Delmar's face turn from red to white, then deepen into a dull gray. How could she tell them? How dare she face them and tell them that, less than two months ago, she had driven the poor, homeless, friendless girl from her door—driven her forth in the storm and darkness of the terrible night, to live or to die, as God saw fit?

Closed her doors against poor, helpless, hapless Doris, and forced her to face the cruel world? She had the grace to feel ashamed. A terrible fear seized her as to the punishment that might be inflicted upon her when they discovered what she had done.

Warring and tyrannizing over a helpless, lone girl was one thing, and answering to a stern, outraged father for those offences was quite another matter. Words seemed to die on her lips.

"You do not answer, madame," cried Hulbert Brandon, springing forward. "Is Doris ill? Has anything befallen our child? For the love of Heaven, speak, I implore you! See, my wife is almost fainting with anxiety!"

"I—I suppose I must speak sooner or later," faltered madame, huskily, hiding her ghastly face in her shaking hands. "Try and be prepared for a bitter blow."

Mrs. Brandon reeled and fell backward unconscious in her husband's arms. Thus she was saved from hearing the cruel falsehood that fell so glibly from Madame Delmar's lips.

"In Heaven's name speak!" cried Mr. Brandon, hoarsely. "Suspense is killing me. I cannot endure it. What of Doris?"

"She is not here. She is gone!" muttered madame.

"Gone!" he repeated, hoarsely. "I—I do not understand."

"She left the seminary two months ago, stole away at midnight under the cover of darkness. She eloped with some one. Whom, or where they met or went, I know not. That is all I can tell you. I am sorry for you, sir. I always loved Doris, dear—sweet little Doris."

"Oh, my God! my God!" groaned the unhappy father, "have we returned *for this!* It will kill my poor wife. It would be better if the girl had died in her infancy. From this hour I disown her. Henceforth I have no daughter. I will not search for her. Let the girl follow the path she has chosen."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ADVENTURE.

Madame Delmar, the dignified principal of the young ladies' seminary, felt considerably perturbed at the strange turn affairs were taking. After her

visitors had taken their leave she quickly sought her brother and told him the whole story.

"If the girl had been here they might have settled a handsome annuity on me for life for providing for her," she groaned. "Yes, by sending her away I have lost a little fortune. Was there ever such an unlucky *contretemps?*"

"It serves you right, I should say," replied John Delmar, "for turning poor little Doris away from home in the bitter storm that night."

"Who would have supposed, after all these long years, her parents would have claimed her, and that the creature I had always looked upon as a dependent and a burden—born to be my especial cross—was, in reality, a millionaire's daughter, heiress to a million of money? Oh, dear, if I had but known that! I would give the world to find Doris again, the poor, dear girl! I—I—am afraid I was a little too harsh with her, John. I never meant to turn her from our door out into the cold world that stormy night. I only meant to frighten her into explaining where she had been. I never thought she would take me at my word and go. Oh, dear! oh, dear! if I could but find her."

"You can never tell when you are entertaining an angel unawares," said John, bluntly. "The poor child had a hard enough life of it here. She was a

girl of spirit. I wonder little Doris did not rebel long before; you were so cross, so cruel, with the child."

"I meant only to discipline the girl properly," faltered madame, her florid face flushed guiltily. "One must be very strict to keep up the reputation of a fashionable seminary for young ladies."

"There ought to be a line drawn somewhere between severity and strictness," declared John, emphatically.

"Would you *really* care to see little Doris again?" he asked, abruptly, eying madame curiously.

She started to her feet, forgetting her usual calm demeanor, her face turning from white to red in her great excitement.

"Do you know where she is, John?" she asked, quickly. "There is something you are trying to keep back from me—something you are trying to hide from me," she declared. "I see it in your face."

"It is fortunate that I *do* know where she is, that I may restore her to her parents," answered John Delmar, gravely.

Madame Delmar was too astonished—too amazed—for words. She listened like one dumbfounded while her brother related that pitiful story of how he had followed poor little Doris out into the storm,

begging her to return, and how she had persistently refused.

"Madame has turned me from her door," she sobbed, "and never again will I willingly cross her threshold." And, finding all remonstrance useless, how he had at length given Doris a letter to the Granvilles in New York, and she had gone on there.

"I shall go to New York at once and fetch her back," declared madame; and, without delay, she put her decision into execution.

To her dismay, she learned, as Doris had learned before her, that they had left the city long since. What, then, had become of hapless Doris?

Cast adrift, homeless, friendless, on the great desolate streets of New York, where had she gone? What had become of her? If ill had befallen poor, pretty, pansy-eyed Doris, the guilty, heartless woman felt that Heaven would hold her accountable for it.

Meanwhile, Mr. Brandon and his heart-sick wife had returned to their elegant villa, on the banks of the St. Lawrence. But, from the hour in which they turned from Madame Delmar's seminary, Mrs. Brandon had grown rapidly ill,—a brain fever had resulted from the horrible shock, and the deep, keen, bitter disappointment she had sustained in learning of the flight of her beautiful young daughter from

the seminary while she was on her way to claim her, after long years of separation.

Her distracted cries for Doris--only for Doris--were pitiful to hear. This was her one dream by day and by night. The bereaved father asked God to pardon him for the rash vow he had uttered against his fair young daughter in the bitter anger of the moment.

He made strenuous efforts to find her; still it was all to no purpose; if the earth had opened and swallowed her, she could not have been more completely lost to the world. And, lying on her sick bed, the poor mother turned her face to the wall, refusing to be comforted.

Mr. Brandon was in despair.

He quite believed they would never be able to find Doris; but he never expressed this thought to his wife. Her dream was never to be realized. She died with the name of "Doris" on her cold, stiffening lips. In a few months' time her husband was called upon to join her. He was a victim to an accident; a train on which he was a passenger had been hurled down an embankment. He was picked up in a fatal condition, and was barely able to make his will in favor of his long lost and missing daughter Doris before death claimed him. Then it was discovered that the

gentleman, known as plain Mr. Hulbert Brandon, was, in reality, Hulbert Brandon Fielding, son of the late Lord Fielding, of Loam Abbey, England.

Dr. Lancaster, of New York city, was named executor of the will. It was well the doctor knew the sad history of Lord Fielding's son; how he had returned with his wife, after long years of absence, to find his child, and the hard experience he had met with.

"Of course, I will do my best to find Miss Fielding, the missing heiress," said the doctor, thoughtfully, as he strolled leisurely down Broadway one morning, "but I fear very much it will be a patient work of years."

"It would be very fortunate if the young girl is modest and well-mannered," said the doctor's wife to her husband one day, "and more fortunate still if our son Karl would fall in love with her."

"Heaven forbid!" groaned the doctor. "By all I can learn of her history from Madame Delmar, the very estimable principal of the seminary where she passed her early life, she is a regular little tartar, quite a barbarian, in fact, and she capped the climax by willfully eloping with some one from boarding-school. No doubt it is some shiftless vagabond whom the girl has fallen in love with and married."

"She is heiress to a million!" sighed the doctor's

wife, "and I should have liked our Karl to marry an heiress."

"There's time enough yet," declared the doctor. "He is only twenty-four now. Men would be better off if they did not marry until thirty."

Meanwhile, fate had destined long since that the doctor's handsome son and Doris should meet. In explaining how it occurred, we must go back to Doris, and that night on which she had left Thornton Villa forever, turning her face toward the crowded streets of New York.

Hour after hour Doris traversed the sunlit streets, sick at heart, and discouraged, as many a young girl has been before her. Suddenly a thought struck Doris.

Why not go to the lady at the agency, who once before, in her time of need, had come to her rescue?

Doris remembered the address, but it was so far up town that she would have to take a car to reach it.

As she stepped upon the platform the car gave a sudden lurch forward, precipitating Doris to the crosswalk. The great iron wheel would have passed over the tiny foot that fell within a hair's breadth of it, and crushed it, if it had not been for the timely assistance of a young man, fortunately close at hand, who sprang forward as in an instant of time, that

seemed an eternity to the horror-stricken, paralyzed spectators, and succeeded in rescuing the lovely young girl from her perilous position.

For a moment Doris was quite stunned by what had transpired.

"I hope you are not hurt," said her rescuer, kindly, as he assisted her to her feet.

A sharp exclamation broke from Doris's lips, and she would have fallen to the pavement again had he not put out his strong arm and caught her.

"I—I am afraid my foot is sprained by the fall," she faltered. "I—I cannot stand."

"Let me call a carriage for you, and take you to your home," said the young man, eagerly. "You are not able to stand."

"No, no," faltered Doris, hiding her face in her hands, and bursting into tears.

"Surely you may trust me; I am a gentleman," he said, courteously. "I am Karl Lancaster, son of Dr. Lancaster, of No. — Lexington Avenue. I also am a doctor and a surgeon. Believe me, if, as you fear, your foot or ankle is sprained, I can be of assistance to you; I beg of you do not hesitate."

And he called a passing cab as he spoke, and despite Doris's incoherent protestations, lifted her in his strong arms as easily as though she were a lit-

tle child, placed her on the soft cushion, and took his seat beside her.

"Now, if you will give the driver your number, please," he said, "we will soon have you with your friends."

"I—I tried to explain before, but, sir, you would not listen," sobbed Doris, in the keenest of embarrassment. "I—I am a stranger in New York. I have no relatives, no friends here. I was just on my way up-town to the employment agency, to apply for a position; and now—oh, Heaven help me!—if my foot is sprained what shall I do?" she moaned.

This was certainly an extraordinary dilemma, but Mr. Lancaster was equal to the emergency.

"In that case I may *still* hope of being of service to you," he answered. "You must put yourself entirely under my charge; will you?"

"I have no right to be a burden upon the kindness of a stranger," sobbed Doris, piteously. "No, no; I *could* not."

"But, under the circumstances, you *must* allow me to act for you," said Karl. "Believe me, it will be a pleasure to aid you," he added, earnestly; and as he looked down into the fair, girlish face, he told himself never, in all his life, had he beheld a being so gloriously fair.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MISSING HEIRESS.

"No, no," repeated Doris, vehemently, "I cannot accept any favor from a stranger's hands. It would not be right."

Fate decreed that it should be otherwise, however; for at that moment, overcome by the pain of the swollen ankle, Doris suddenly fell backward against the cushions in a deep swoon.

Mr. Lancaster immediately gave the order to No. — West Twenty-third street. This was a fashionable up-town boarding-house, and to the landlady, Mrs. Morgan, Dr. Lancaster's son was well known.

She was sitting at the window when the coach stopped before her door. She looked with amazement as the door of the vehicle was suddenly flung open, and Mr. Lancaster stepped to the pavement bearing the unconscious figure of a young girl in

his arms. What could it possibly mean? She admitted him herself.

In a few brief words, as he laid his unconscious burden down upon the sofa, Karl told Mrs. Morgan how he had met the lovely young stranger, and rescued her from being crippled for life—but that the violent fall to the pavement had injured her ankle, however.

With Mrs. Morgan's assistance, the swollen ankle was soon attended to.

It was not as bad as he had at first supposed; still it would necessitate the fair patient's keeping her room for a fortnight at least.

"And you want me to keep her here until she is able to be about?" asked Mrs. Morgan, dubiously. "I would do anything in the world for you or your family, Karl, for your father's skill saved my child's life once—I never forget that; but I feel a little reluctant about taking in this stranger. You should have taken her to the hospital."

Karl could not bear the thought, somehow.

"She is so fair, so fragile and delicate, it seems a pity to send her there."

While they had been speaking, Mrs. Morgan had been vigorously applying cold water, to which a few drops of ammonia had been added, to the patient's face, to revive her from her protracted

swoon. Her face, hands and hair were bathed and rubbed briskly to start the circulation of blood, when lo! a strange thing happened under the strong action of the ammonia.

The dark stain commenced to quickly disappear from both face and hair.

Mrs. Morgan called Karl to her side with a cry of dismay.

"Look, Mr. Lancaster!" she cried. "The girl is disguised! She is fair as a lily—not dark!"

Karl's amazement was certainly as great as her own. They looked at each other in silence and dismay.

"There is some dark mystery here, depend upon it," declared Mrs. Morgan, emphatically. "No young woman who lives an honest, straightforward life has anything to conceal. This girl may be a thief, an impostor, or worse. I am sorry I took her in. I shall never know a moment's peace, with watching her night and day, while she is under this roof. She must be taken away."

"I cannot bring myself to believe that there is anything wrong about her," declared Karl, impulsively. "I really cannot."

Mrs. Morgan looked at him sharply.

"I should say her pretty face has bewitched you, Mr. Lancaster."

She little dreamed how near the truth these words were.

"As I said before, out of this house she goes to-morrow, Mr. Karl. I am sorry for her; but I cannot have her here. She must be taken to the hospital."

"I will call to-morrow, then, and see about effecting the change, if you *must* have it so," said Karl, disappointedly and coldly.

When the morrow came, Doris could not be moved. A high fever set in, and her condition was quite alarming. In a week's time, however, the fever had abated, and the danger was past.

But in those few days Karl had been a daily visitor at the house. Whole hours he spent at his patient's bedside, skillfully battling with the fatal fever, until at last it was under control.

And in those days Karl had learned to love the beautiful stranger with all the ardor of his nature. She was his first and only love—and first love is the sweetest dream of life.

At the end of the week, again Mrs. Morgan insisted upon having the lovely young stranger removed.

Though weak, Doris was conscious. She had refused to divulge her name to Mrs. Morgan, saying simply, "Call me Doris; only that. More I cannot

tell you. I am very unhappy. No young girl has suffered more than I have in this world, and more unjustly."

One day, when Karl called, he found Doris's eyes heavy with unshed tears, and he felt then that Mrs. Morgan must have spoken to Doris about wanting her apartment.

"I am going to leave you to-day, Mr. Lancaster," she said, holding out a mite of a slim, white hand to him. "You have been very kind to me. I shall never forget what you have done for me. I can never repay you for it, save by my most heartfelt gratitude."

"But where are you going?" he asked, earnestly. "You are too weak and ill to face the world. What will you do?"

"I do not know," responded Doris, drearily.

In a moment handsome, impulsive Karl was beside her.

"Let me tell you what to do," he cried, eagerly. "Marry me. I love you. When I first looked upon your face I said to myself: She, and no other shall be my bride if I can win her. Our acquaintance has not been long, still, it has been long enough for me to know. If I lost you, life would not be worth the living. Yes, I love you with all the deep, earnest affection of a heart that has never throbbed with

love for any woman before. Marry me, and let me take you to my father's home, and present you to him and to my mother as my cherished bride. My life will be devoted to you. You shall never know one wish unfulfilled."

"Stop! stop!" gasped Doris, incoherently, as she endeavored to check the torrent of his impassioned words. "Do not, I pray you, speak so to me. It can never be. I—I am sorry, for you have been so kind to me. While I am most grateful to you, I repeat that I can never, never marry you."

The young man started to his feet, dropped the little hand he held, and looked at her. Never had she appeared so fatally lovely to him, as in this moment in which she told him she never could be his.

"Tell me," he cried, approaching a step nearer to her, his face paling, "is my cause hopeless? Do you love any one else?"

"Yes," she said, simply, "I love another, and love as hopelessly as you love me. For that reason my heart aches with the keenest sympathy for you. You must learn to forget me, Mr. Lancaster."

"It will be hard for me," he said, gently. "I have learned to love you so well. If you were to ask me for my life at this moment I would give it to

you; and if ever you want a friend, remember my words. I will give my life to serve you."

"Thank you," she faltered. "If the time should come when I want you, I shall not forget."

"You will, at least, give me your full name?" he said, sadly. "It is cruel to know you only as Doris."

"Then know me as Doris Brandon," she murmured.

The name had a strangely familiar sound to it, but he was too much perturbed just then to think of it.

"If I knew you were going to home and friends I could feel happier," he said.

And he never forgot the sad voice in which she replied:

"On the whole face of the earth I have neither home nor kindred. I am alone in the world! Alone!"

Those were the words which haunted him as he left the house and walked slowly toward his home.

His father was in the library. Karl paused on the threshold as his father called his name.

"Still poring over those papers, father?" he asked, as he drew up a chair to the table. "I have advised you, in my opinion, the only way to find this long-lost heiress, Miss Fielding, is to advertise in all the leading papers for information concerning her."

"Many an adventuress, tempted by so magnificent a fortune, might respond," declared the doctor. "No; I prefer to go about it in a more methodical way, by tracing Miss Fielding, or Miss Brandon—Miss Doris Brandon, the name she was called there by—from the school she—"

In a flash Karl Lancaster had sprung to his feet.

"*Doris Brandon!*" he gasped. "Great Heaven! am I mad, or do I dream?"

In an instant he had seized his hat and rushed from the house.

Dr. Lancaster stared after his son's rapidly vanishing form in the greatest astonishment.

"I cannot think what is getting over the boy of late," he mused. "Now, why should he start off in that abrupt fashion?"

Meanwhile Karl had hailed a passing coupé and sprang into it.

"To Number — West Twenty-third street!" he cried. "Make it as quick as you can, driver."

The man whipped up his horses, and the vehicle fairly flew down the avenue, but to the impatient young man it seemed to fairly creep along.

"Doris Brandon!" he cried, hoarsely. "Heaven! how strange it is that the name did not strike me as the one by which Mr. Hulbert Brandon Fielding's ong-lost heiress was known by while at boarding-

school! And her face! Ah! there could be no mistaking the lovely childish face, framed inits riangs of soft golden curls, so like the face of Mr. Brandon's wife, only younger, sweeter, fairer."

There remained no doubt in his mind but what Doris was the long-lost heiress for whom his father was searching so diligently.

A moment later the coach drew up in front of Mrs. Morgan's boarding-house.

In a flash Karl was up the steps, and the vigorous peal of the bell brought the landlady herself to the door.

"What! Is it *you* back so soon again, Mr. Lancaster?" she said, looking curiously into the flushed, eager, handsome face.

"Yes!" he answered, impetuously. "I must see Doris at once, please. Tell her it is a matter of the greatest importance."

"You are too late, Mr. Lancaster," she replied. "Doris is gone. She left the house about twenty minutes ago."

Gone! The word smote him like a blow. Gone! He could scarcely believe he had heard aright.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GYPSY GIRL.

Since the night of the sad tragedy Frederick Thornton was a changed man. He grew morose and silent, spending his time shut up in the library, or whole hours by the river bank, gazing thoughtfully, and with bitter regret, on the sunlit water, beneath which he believed Doris lay in all her sweet, young beauty.

The discovery of Vivian's true disposition, beneath that mask of smiles, had been a severe shock to him; his whole soul revolted at the thought of marrying her now.

He concluded to leave home for awhile, and seek such solace as a life of travel would bring him, and forget, as far as he could, the sweet, fair face of the lovely young bride whom he had won only to lose on their bridal day.

One morning, coming down to breakfast a little earlier than usual, Mrs. Thornton saw her son stand-

ing, buried in deep thought, by the lace-draped window.

"Mother," he called, wheeling suddenly about, "will you see that a few necessary articles are packed up in my valise with as little delay as possible? I am going away for a few months."

Mrs. Thornton trembled. This was an unlooked-for procedure. In vain she pleaded, coaxed and argued with her handsome son. He was inexorable.

"I must go away for a time, mother," he said. "Do not oppose me."

"But Vivian!" she said. "Your going will break her heart."

A scornful smile curled his cynical lips. He was just about to reply: "You are mistaken there, mother; she has no heart," but he checked the impetuous words.

His mother had scarcely quitted the morning-room ere he saw a small lad approaching the house in a hesitating manner. Frederick drew back the heavy lace curtain, and called to the boy.

"I want to see Mr. Frederick Thornton," said the lad. "Can you tell me where I can find him, sir?"

"Right here, my boy. I am Frederick Thornton. What can I do for you?"

"I am to place this letter in your hand, sir, and

wait for a reply," he said, touching his cap. "The gentleman who gave it to me is pacing up and down the ravine yonder, waiting for the answer."

"I will not keep you waiting long," said Frederick.

He had noticed that the envelope bore Mr. Courtney's chirography, and was written in pencil.

He tore open the envelope, and ran his eyes over the note it contained, his handsome face turning strangely pale as he read.

It was brief, to the point, and read as follows:

"MR. FREDERICK THORNTON—*Sir:* The announcement of the dissolution of the engagement of marriage which has existed between my daughter Vivian and yourself has just reached me. You have annulled that bond coolly and deliberately, is seems, without just cause or provocation (as there it no barrier between you and Vivian), exposing her to the comment of the whole social world by this outrageous conduct. I, as her father and protector, demand that the marriage *shall go on.* She must be your wife ere the sun sets, or I shall demand, on your refusal to comply with so perfectly reasonable a request, the only satisfaction one gentleman can accord another—a duel. And within the hour in the deep ravine that skirts the cliff down the road, there I await your answer. Will you marry Vivian, or shall the duel go on?

"COLONEL COURTNEY."

Not a muscle of Frederick Thornton's face changed. A stern expression crept into the grave, dark eyes and around his mouth. He knew that colonel was perfectly well aware of the conditions under which that engagement with Vivian was contracted; that, owing to that fatal accident, all memory of a bride waiting for him, or all trace of her presence, had been obliterated completely from his mind. In all truth and honor, he had believed himself free to woo and win the old soldier's daughter.

It was quite true, since Doris's death (as he believed her to be dead), no barrier rose between himself and Vivian, save his own inclination.

He was too honorable to wed Vivian without love, and love her he did not. He had no heart to offer her. His heart was buried in poor little Doris's grave.

He would not be coerced into marrying Vivian. He would be true to poor little Doris's memory while his life lasted.

He tore a leaf from his memorandum book and penciled the following words upon it:

"Let the duel go on. I will be upon the ground at the appointed time.

"FREDERICK THORNTON."

This he hastily folded up and handed to the

lad, who quickly disappeared with the fatal message.

Five—ten—minutes passed. Frederick Thornton still stood by the window, motionless, gazing out into the brilliant sunshine; then he turned away with a sigh, and set about making his preparations for the coming event. The time was short, but he completed his business arrangements, and wrote out the directions for the distribution of his effects.

The whole earth looked so peaceful, so smiling, under the light of the summer's sun, that poor Frederick told himself it would be hard, indeed, to leave it.

Mrs. Thornton never forgot how pale her handsome son looked as he came into the room, took her in his arms and kissed her, saying that he was going to stroll down the road a little way, the morning was so fine.

Was it instinct, a forewarning of some dread calamity, that caused his mother to follow him to the porch, refusing to be comforted?

"I don't feel right about your going out this morning, Frederick, my son," she sobbed. "Something tells me I shall never see you as I see you now. Something tells me you should not go."

"Nonsense, mother. I will come back to you in

an hour's time, if my life is spared," he said, with stiff, white lips.

Would to Heaven she could have understood how fatally true those words were.

He tore himself from her clinging clasp, and kissing the white hands that would have held him back from ruin and destruction, with swift footsteps walked rapidly down the paved walk, and out of the grounds.

He stopped a moment on the brow of the hill and looked around him. When that same sun rose again, he might never see it, or if he lived, his hands would be dyed with a fellow-creature's life-blood. Frederick Thornton shuddered, then a reckless sort of laugh broke from his lips.

How green the sloping hillside looked, dotted here and there with brilliant wild flowers and spreading beech trees. The river danced in the sunlight beyond and its music sounded like a dirge in his ears.

Toward the right of the stream the greensward was dotted here and there with gypsy tents; swarthy men and maidens making the air ring with their rollicksome songs. Quite apart from the rest, and directly in the path before Frederick, a young girl sat. A tambourine, decked with bright, gay ribbons, lay on the grass beside her, and her gaudy,

AH! SHE WAS TOO LATE.—*See Chapter XXIV.*

picturesque dress, her long dark hair, and bright, black, glancing eyes betokened her race.

A gay, dashing song broke from her crimson lips, and Frederick Thornton stopped short in the path, his arms folded across his chest, his head drooping upon his breast, and listened.

The gypsy girl raised her eyes suddenly, and saw the stranger standing in the daisy-studded path.

She bounded to her feet with the agility of a graceful young gazelle, and courtesied low before him.

"Have you come to us to have your fortune told, handsome youth?" she asked, raising her dark, lustrous eyes to his face. "I can tell you all the mysteries that lie in the future, and the dark shadows that have gathered in the background of the past."

Although he knew better, Frederick stood for a moment irresolute. At any other time in life he would have scorned the proffered offer; but now, when life and death hung in the balance, a feverish unrest possessed him to hear what she would tell him.

Long and earnestly the gypsy girl gazed into the palm of the white, shapely hand she held in her own small dusk ones.

"You are unhappy in your love," she said, slowly.

Frederick Thornton laughed a mirthless, reckless laugh; but a strange, brooding shadow crept into his eyes, and a flush rose to his pale, handsome face, which told the crafty maiden that her shaft had struck home, as it usually did.

"Do you see a long life or a speedy death for me?" he questioned, curiously.

And although he spoke carelessly, his lips whitened perceptibly.

"Death," she said, in a whisper.

"Let it come—I have courted it," returned Frederick, impatiently. "I have nothing to live for, any how."

Although he spoke bravely, he could realize how hard it was to die in the spring-time of youth; to bid farewell to the green earth and fair, smiling heavens; to be rushed, all unprepared—where? He could hear no more. Hurriedly tossing a handful of bright silver coin into her lap he moved on.

For some minutes the gypsy girl stood staring after the tall, manly figure hurrying so rapidly away.

"Can it be that *he* is the one they are waiting for down in the glen?" she muttered, under her breath.

"He is handsome as a prince. They must not fight the duel I heard them talking about."

Swiftly as a shadow the gypsy girl glided after him.

"Where are you going, Zetta?" cried a gruff voice in the girl's ear, and a heavy hand was laid on her shoulder; and looking up she saw her father standing before her.

"Let me go," she cried, struggling to free herself from his grasp. "Let me go quick—I must!"

"I want you in the tent. Where is the silver you had just now--come, where is it?"

She threw the handful of coins on the ground.

"There—it is all there," she cried. "Let me go."

"And I say there is more hidden in your pocket. Come into the tent and we shall see," he declared, gruffly.

Ten minutes later Zetta was speeding like a storm-driven swallow down the path. Would she be too late to carry out her daring plan to stop the duel, if one was intended? Ten minutes! Many a life has been jeopardized and lost in one half of that time. As she reached the summit of the hill she gave a piercing cry. Ah, *she was too late!* She had heard no sound of shot or sabre, yet a group of men were gathered around a prostrate figure lying prone on its face upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXV.

COLD, LOVELESS AND DREARY.

For one instant Karl Lancaster stood quite still like one stricken dumb. Doris was gone! Gone! How the words smote upon his ear!

"Why, how white you look, Mr. Lancaster!" said Mrs. Morgan, looking curiously into the young man's white, handsome face.

He turned abruptly away and flung open the door. Mrs. Morgan was at his side in an instant, laying a detaining hand on his arm.

"What are you about to do, Mr. Lancaster?" she cried, anxiously.

"I am going to search for her until I find her," answered Karl, hoarsely. "I will search the whole world over for her, if needs be." And with these words he rushed from the room and out of the house.

"The poor fellow has gone clear daft," sighed Mrs. Morgan. "It was well that I sent the girl

away before he returned. Why, he would actually marry that girl if he could find her. And, oh! what a stormy scene there would be under the old doctor's roof! I am sure his father would disinherit him on the spot. He would never forgive him for making a mésalliance. Never!"

Meanwhile Karl Lancaster, with his heart on fire and his brain in a whirl, was threading his way swiftly along the crowded thoroughfare.

Which way had poor, pretty Doris gone? Where should he find her? Suddenly a thought occurred to him that almost took his breath away. He remembered Doris had been on her way to an employment agency on that day the accident had occurred which had so nearly proven fatal. What more natural or probable than that she had bent her steps in that direction now? He remembered the number, and lost no time in making his way there at once. And the first person whom his eyes rested upon as he opened the door was Doris herself.

She started in surprise as she saw him. *What!* had he *followed* her here! And, like Mrs. Morgan, she was struck by the strange pallor of his face.

"Doris—Miss Brandon!" he said, coming up to her and catching one of the little white clasped hands that lay so idly in her lap. "Thank God, I have found you!

"I have much that is of the greatest importance to say to you, Doris," he went on, "but I cannot speak here."

The reception-room beyond was almost deserted at this hour of the day. Karl pointed toward it.

"Come there with me, Doris," he said; "I have that to tell you which will sound more like the pages of romance than reality; but it only serves to illustrate the old adage that truth is indeed stranger than fiction."

Doris shrank back from him, with the memory of that scene, in which he had madly declared his love for her, beseeching her to marry him, rushing over her mind.

Had he followed her to repeat that scene? she wondered.

Karl saw her hesitancy, and read her thoughts and dread aright.

"It is not of myself I wish to speak—not one word," he said, flushing deeply. "That which I have to say concerns you, and you alone, Doris. Come!"

In wonder and dismay, Doris followed him to the reception-room beyond. He placed a chair for her, and stood leaning against the mantel, seemingly in no hurry to begin.

Doris sat twisting her little white hands nervously

together, wondering what new calamity was about to befall her now.

"It was fate that led you to me, Doris," began Karl Lancaster, huskily. "But before I proceed, I must be sure that I am on the right track—beyond any possible shadow of a doubt ere I raise your hopes.

"In the first place, are you the Doris Brandon whose life, up to a few weeks ago, was passed at Madame Delmar's seminary at Beech Grove?"

He scarcely breathed in his intensity to catch her answer.

"Yes, I am that most unhappy girl!" breathed Doris, faintly. "But why do you ask? How could you have found out that?"

Like one in a confused dream, Doris listened while he told her the wonderful story—of her father and mother's return, after long years, to reclaim their child, only to find her gone, none knew whither; of their grief, her mother's death, and the fatal accident which caused her father to follow her soon after, having barely time to make his will, leaving his vast wealth to his daughter, with the earnest prayer she should be sought for, night and day, until she was found.

"This fortune was to be kept in trust for Mr. Hulbert Brandon Fielding's daughter until she is eigh-

teen. My father has been searching for the lost heiress ever since.

"I thought when I heard the name, 'Doris Brandon,' it had a strangely familiar sound; but not until to-day—an hour since—did the astounding revelation occur to me that the young girl fate had drifted across my path, and the lost heiress my father was searching for, were one and the same. Allow me to be the first, Miss Fielding, to congratulate you upon the good fortune that has befallen you."

The beautiful, dreamy, blue eyes were expanded in the greatest amazement. All the color had faded from the fair young face, leaving it paler than the petals of a white lily. He believed she had not comprehended what he had said, and he repeated:

"You are an heiress, Miss Fielding—heiress to a million of dollars in your own right, which my father, as your guardian, is to hold in trust for you until you are eighteen."

"Oh, Mr. Lancaster, do you really believe it?" cried Doris, breathlessly. "Is there no mistake? Surely there must be. Fate has been so unkind to me all my life it must be playing some trick on me now," she declared.

"If you are the Doris Brandon who has lived

with Madame Delmar up to a short time ago, there can be no possible mistake."

Doris sprang to her feet, trembling with emotion. "I can scarcely believe that I, Doris Brandon, whom the world has used so cruelly, am indeed an heiress," she cried, pushing back the rings of golden curls from her flushed face in a bewildered sort of way. "I am only a poor dependent, whom nobody has ever cared for," she went on, piteously. "I have never had any money." I am unused to wealth and luxury. My life has been hard, lone and dreary. I should not know what to do with money."

"After you have seen a little more of the world, you won't say that," smiled Karl. "Why, ladies know how to make money fairly fly. I am not surprised at your agitation. A disclosure such as I have made to you would turn almost any young lady's head. No wonder you are bewildered. Perhaps no young girl ever had more cause. But you must bear prosperity as you have borne adversity. From this time out your whole life will be changed. Your future will be brilliant; for, with wealth and beauty combined, life is full of golden promise."

A dazzling smile parted the girl's beautiful crimson lips, and the color surged back to the sweet young face in a burning tide. In her great excite-

ment, she forgot what Karl was saying to her. She did not hear one word. Doris's thoughts had drifted back to Frederick Thornton, and her heart was crying out:

"Would he have turned from me had he known I was one day to become a great heiress—quite as much of an heiress as Vivian, whom he loved?

"Oh, Frederick," she moaned out in the bitterness of her own heart, "what would all the wealth in the world be worth to me without your love?"

Doris offered no resistance when Karl proposed that she should accompany him home at once.

Dr. Lancaster was more than amazed when, a little later, a cab stopped before his palatial residence, and from it stepped his son, leading by the hand a young girl, plainly dressed, almost to shabbiness, but with a face as gloriously beautiful as an angel's.

It had been the one secret fear of his life that some day his son might marry on the impulse of the moment, attracted by the pretty face of some lovely working-girl chance might throw in his way. And he meant that this handsome son of his should marry an heiress, or not marry at all. Like his wife, he had the secret hope that the heiress, Miss Fielding, might be found, and that she and his son might be mutually attracted toward each other.

His brow grew dark and stormy as the quick footsteps drew near the library. As the door opened, he rose to his feet, coldly confronting the two who stood on the threshold.

He expected to hear the words:

"Father, bid us welcome. I have brought you home a daughter. Welcome my bride, father."

Instead, his son stepped forward, leading the pretty, timid, shrinking young girl by the hand, saying, hurriedly:

"Father, behold Miss Doris Brandon Fielding! I have discovered the long-lost heiress—at last! Bid her welcome, father."

"*What!*" cried the old gentleman, quite believing his ears had deceived him,—"do I hear aright?"

"I hope so father," said Karl, smiling. "I said I had found Miss Fielding, for whom you have been searching so long and patiently. Bid her welcome."

"I—do not—comprehend," exclaimed the old gentleman. "How and where did you meet this young lady, and what reason have you for believing her to be the child of my poor friend Fielding and his heart-broken wife?"

"Her face—in which the resemblance to both is so strongly marked—might answer that question—even if I did not," laughed Karl, and in a few brief words he explained to his father, and his mother

also, who had been summoned, the story of his meeting with Doris. Then there was no lack of warmth in the doctor's hearty greeting.

"Why, it sounds just like a romance, my dear," declared Mrs. Lancaster, taking the lovely young orphan in her arms and kissing her delightedly. "Welcome—a thousand times welcome—Doris! You will permit me to call you that, will you not? It does sound so cold and formal to say Miss Fielding, and you are to be one of the family, for at least a year yet, dear, until my husband's guardianship of you expires."

"Call me Doris, by all means," the girl replied. "I should like that best. I—am afraid I can never get used to being addressed as Miss Fielding; even now, I am afraid I shall wake up and find all this but a dream," said Doris, piteously.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DORIS IN LUXURY.

The sudden change from earning her own living to the luxury in which Doris found herself, would have dazzled almost any young girl, older and

wiser than Doris, and she wondered how she had ever lived through that cold, dark past,—that desolate past, which was left behind her forevermore.

Mrs. Lancaster made all possible haste in attending to Doris's wardrobe.

"You must discard that blue merino dress of yours at once, my dear. The neighbors would never forget it if they saw you in that," declared the lady.

So the next fortnight was spent in daily excursions to the dry goods emporiums and establishments of the leading modistes.

Doris could scarcely realize that the radiant little figure which her mirror reflected, robed in shimmering silk,—in whose tiny, shell-like ears, and on whose small white hands costly diamonds glittered like stars, was the same Doris who had sobbed herself to sleep, many and many a night, with Madame Delmar's cruel, taunting words ringing in her ears:

"You are a miserable, dependent creature; you ought to be thankful for a crust of bread, and a roof to cover your head,—content with my cast-off dresses, and that you have been given any education whatever."

Now all the world was changed for Doris. She was courted, petted and flattered; a widely differ-

ent personage from the timid young girl we first introduced to our readers.

"I am proud of you, Doris," said Mrs. Lancaster, complacently, one day. "Your beauty will create quite a commotion in society; you will turn the heads of all the marriageable young fellows. Young girls of your age generally have some ideal hero pictured in their minds. But when your Prince Charming comes along, you must not be in a hurry to marry. A year or so will be plenty of time for that."

"I shall *never* marry," said Doris, paling to the very lips, and a look of keen distress in her dark blue eyes. "Please do not mention marriage to me again, Mrs. Lancaster. I shall *never* marry."

"Fie, fie, my dear. No one but old maids whom nobody wants, or some creature who has been crossed in love, ever make such a remark as that. It sounds ridiculous on the lips of a pretty girl. You cannot rule your own heart, my dear Doris. Love goes where Heaven intended it should go, and when the right one comes along you will say to yourself, 'I can never be happy without him,' and it will end as it should—in a marriage."

But Doris shook her curly head with a dreary sigh.

That night Dr. Lancaster and his wife held quite a lengthy debate in their own apartments in refer-

ence to Doris, and, as usual, the determined little lady carried the point.

"Doris is pretty, and is graceful as a wild flower is graceful, I grant,—but she lacks the culture that fits one for society," declared Mrs. Lancaster, energetically, "and it must be attended to without delay. Her education in music and the higher branches has been sadly neglected. We must engage competent persons to remedy this defect at once."

And so they settled the matter. Doris was an apt pupil, and progressed wonderfully with her studies. There was one incentive above all others that urged Doris on in her desire to fit herself for the social world that lay before her—she would be sure to meet Frederick Thornton there; that was the beginning and the end, the goal of her ambition.

She told herself she must see him just once; then she would be willing to shut herself away from the gay world forever after that one hour of triumph.

No timid young girl likes to discuss those vague, sweet heart-thoughts to a matter of fact old lady, and Doris shrank from even mentioning that pitiful, broken love-dream to practical Mrs. Lancaster.

Remembering Madame Delmar had declared Doris had eloped from the seminary, Mrs. Lancaster broached very carefully whether or not Doris had

ever had a lover, and how she happened to leave the seminary to seek a position of governess in New York.

"I will speak of this mattter just once," Doris replied, with a little sob in her voice. "I do not like to think of it. It is like opening an old wound. Madame Delmar turned me from the seminary door, because she was tired of keeping the penniless girl —who was dependent on her bounty—under her roof longer. I was *forced* to go out into the world. And as for a lover—ah, Mrs. Lancaster, I had no lover. No one loved me; no one."

The time came at last when Miss Fielding, Doctor Lancaster's lovely ward, was finally launched upon the tidal wave of society. As Mrs. Lancaster had foreseen, she created quite a furore. Receptions, parties, balls, followed each other in rapid succession, and pretty Doris was queen of them all. Yet she always came home with the same piteous pain in her lovely, childish eyes. It had been another evening lost out of her life, for she had not met Frederick Thornton.

Believing her dead, had he married Vivian and taken her abroad? From the moment this idea occurred to her, Doris had a feverish desire to go abroad.

An opportunity soon presented itself. Dr. Lan-

caster received a letter one day, urging his immediate presence in London, and it was arranged that his wife and Doris should accompany him on this flying trip.

The next steamer brought Karl.

"I thought father might need me, perhaps," he said; but his mother knew better. She was sure Doris's bright eyes had been the magnet.

As time rolled on, Mrs. Lancaster began to grow anxious over her son; his deep adoring love for Doris was so marked, while she, in return, gave him only a sister's kindly friendship—nothing more.

All in vain pretty young girls gazed at the tall, handsome, fair-haired young American; he had no eyes for them; his whole thought, night and day, was of Doris—only of her.

"My patient love, my great devotion, must win love in return. I can wait for it," he told himself over and over again.

Three long years passed, and it seemed to Karl Lancaster he was further than ever from Doris's love. If ever a woman had been born without a heart, or it had turned to marble in her breast, that woman was Doris.

The three years spent abroad had done much for Doris; it had expanded her from the bud of girl hood into the bloom of perfect womanhood. She

had been pretty as the child of seventeen. At twenty, taller by almost half a head, she had grown into the full, dazzling beauty of perfect womanhood.

Suitors sought her hand, laying love, fame and fortune at her feet; but to one and all she gave the same gracious answer:

"I thank you for the kind compliment you pay me in asking me to be your wife. I am sorry you love me. I shall never marry—never."

When Mrs. Lancaster saw Doris dismiss one lover after another, a strange smile came to her lips.

"She must really like Karl, I am beginning to believe," she told herself.

She did not know that long since her handsome son had declared his love for Doris, only to be kindly but firmly refused. And he knew that which his mother never dreamed of—long since, in the shadowy past, Doris had given her heart to one who had not returned her love.

"It was only a girl's foolish, romantic love-dream," he told himself. "In time it will fade away from her memory; then I may stand some chance of winning her.

He was true to his promise. He never breathed one word of love to her; yet Doris could read it in his face, if she spoke one kind word to him, in the wistful expression of his eyes as they followed her

about, and the trembling of his hand as it clasped hers in greeting.

"I am sorry for poor Karl!" she often murmured, when she was alone with her thoughts. "I, of all others in the world, know how to pity a person who loves one who cannot return that love. He is so patient, so kind; I am sorry for him—so sorry. Poor Karl!"

Leaving Doris for a little while, we must return to Frederick Thornton, and to that critical moment when he turned from the narrow path into the open glade, where Mr. Courtney awaited him, in company with the gentlemen who had been selected to act as seconds in the duel which was to take place.

He had barely reached the opening ere a strange sight burst upon his view. Scarcely a rod from where he stood, riveted to the spot in amazement and dismay, he beheld the prostrate form of his would-be opponent stretched, face downward, on the greensward, with his friends bending over him with grave, white faces.

"Had foul play been done here? If so, *he* of all others would be suspected," Frederick told himself.

But he was no coward. Boldly he made his way up to the group standing around his prostrate foe.

They made way for him.

"There will be no duel, Mr. Thornton," explained one of the colonel's friends. "It seems that Colonel Courtney worked himself into such a passion of fury that he has been attacked by a very severe apoplectic stroke. We are about to improvise a stretcher and convey him home at once."

Deep and sincere was the regret Frederick felt for the colonel's affliction.

"I should never have aimed my revolver at him, gentlemen," he said. "I had intended to fire into the air."

As the duel was thus far practically abandoned, Frederick retraced his steps homeward.

That night he carried out his original intention of leaving Thornton Villa, taking care to send his address to the colonel.

His sisters wept, and his mother, clinging to the neck of her handsome, manly son, refused to be comforted.

"You are going abroad, Frederick," she said. "You may be gone long years. Perhaps I shall never see you again."

"Nonsense, mother," he declared. "I shall not

be gone longer than three years—four at farthest. The time will soon slip around."

"And is it quite true you and Vivian have parted forever, my son?" she asked, wistfully. "Are you quite *sure* you do not love Vivian?"

"Never speak to me of love again, mother," he answered, huskily. "My heart is buried in little Doris's grave."

CHAPTER XXVII.

DORIS AND FREDERICK MEET AGAIN.

For three long and weary years Frederick Thornton traveled incessantly; but his great effort to forget Doris was all in vain. The sweet, dimpled, girlish face was between him and the sunshine—filled his thoughts—made his life one long regret.

"How strange it was," he often told himself, "that he had discovered his love for poor, pretty Doris in the very hour that he had lost her so cruelly!"

Three years had made little change in Frederick Thornton. He was the same handsome Frederick as of old; all save the gay, laughing sparkle in the

dark, expressive eyes. That had died out of them forever, leaving them thoughtful and gloomy, with a look of brooding melancholy in them that never left them.

Pretty young girls sighed and smiled at the handsome American all in vain. He seemed to be oblivious to the charms of fair women, or else marble-hearted, they often declared.

After three years of incessant traveling, fate brought him, one sunlit June morning, to the little village of Kent, lying among the Kentish hills. He was delighted to find there was a party of Americans stopping at the villa across the way. Strolling out upon the piazza of the hostelry, the first person whom his eyes rested upon was his old college chum, Karl Lancaster.

"Well, by all that's wonderful, if it isn't Fred Thornton!" exclaimed Karl, cheerily, as he wrung his old friend's hand in the greatest delight. "This is, indeed, a surprise. Where in the world did you drop from?"

"I came up from London for a few weeks' quiet," exclaimed Frederick, adding: "I return to New York at the end of the month."

"The deuce you do!" exclaimed Karl, impulsively. "Do you think I shall consent to lose my

old chum so easily? No, indeed! You will make a valuable acquisition to our little party."

"Who is there among your party?" inquired Frederick.

"Only my mother and father, father's ward—Miss Fielding—and myself. We have just got rid of two noble lords and an earl who persisted in following us about from place to place, having been smitten with father's ward; but finding their suit useless, one by one gave up in despair, and went his way."

Frederick smiled.

"You must come over and dine with us to-day, and I will present you to Miss Fielding; but I warn you beforehand, do not attempt to fall in love with her."

"No doubt *you* have hopes in that direction," smiled Thornton. "But you need not fear a rival in me. I have gotten over being a beauty worshiper. I always avoid women, when I can."

"I hope you are not going to turn out a cynical woman-hater," declared Karl. "That would never do. Never!

"I shall expect you to dine with us to-day, and I shall not take 'No' for an answer," said Karl again, at parting.

"In that case, it would be useless to give any other answer than one in the affirmative," smiled

Frederick; "so I shall probably put in an appearance some time during the afternoon. Kindly remember me to your father and mother."

After a little the friends parted, Karl going toward the villa, and Frederick Thornton strolling leisurely down the flower-strewn path that led toward the river that lay smiling beyond. How long he stood there, in a dreamy reverie, on the primrose-bordered bank he never knew. He was aroused at length by the sound of hurried footsteps, and turning his head slightly, a sight met his view that he never forgot until his dying day. From an abrupt curve in the path—seemingly from out of the very heart of a thicket of roses—stepped a young girl, a tall, slim, lovely creature, graceful as a fawn, with a face so radiantly lovely in its fair, dimpled, girlish beauty as to almost take his breath away at the first fatal glance. Surely the summer sunlight had never fallen upon a fairer picture than this beautiful, golden-haired young girl.

She was hurrying along so swiftly, she did not perceive the tall, handsome stranger leaning against the trunk of a tree, gazing at her so intently.

She passed so near Frederick, he could have put out his hand and touched her dress; and suddenly, in that instant, a passing, sportive breeze caught the broad sun-hat that was tilted down over her curls,

lifted it from her head, and hurled it directly at Frederick Thornton's feet.

Quickly he stooped to recover it.

"Permit me," he said, extending the hat by its blue ribbons with one hand, and raising his own with a courteous bow with the other.

The young girl started back with a low cry of terror, and looked into his face, clutching one hand tightly over her heart. As the reader has already imagined, it was Doris.

After three long years she stood face to face with Frederick Thornton again. And she saw, too, that he did not recognize her, so great was the change in her. Ah, it was little wonder he did not, believing Doris to be lying cold in her grave on the other side of the blue, rolling Atlantic. He heard the low, gasping cry, and saw the blanching of the lovely dimpled cheeks.

"I beg a thousand pardons if I have startled you," he said, eagerly. "I fancied you must have seen me standing here as you came down the path."

Doris received the hat from his hand with a little nervous bow. She could not trust herself to answer him, so great was her emotion; she almost fancied she would fall down dead at his feet in the long, primrose-studded grass.

What reply she made, she never knew. Turning away, she hurried swiftly down the path.

"Frederick Thornton!" she murmured, pantingly, when she was quite out of sight and hearing—"Ah, Heaven, what can he be doing here?"

She was so strangely excited, flushing and paling by turns, that she quite alarmed Mrs. Lancaster when she returned to the villa.

"Why, what is the matter, my dear Doris?" she exclaimed, in dismay. "Really, you look as though you had seen a ghost." Before Doris could reply she went on quickly: "I want you to look your best this evening, Doris dear, for Karl brings an old friend to dine with us—a Mr. Thornton. He was a great friend of Karl's at college. I have known his family intimately for years."

"You will have to excuse me this evening, Mrs. Lancaster," pleaded Doris. "I have the most severe headache I have ever had in all my life."

Looking into the flushed face and unnaturally brilliant eyes, who could doubt it?

"Lie down and take a short rest, my dear," suggested Mrs. Lancaster. "You will be all right by evening."

Still Doris lingered.

How she longed to ask if Vivian was with him,

but pride forbade. Of course, believing himself free, he had married Vivian long since.

Frederick Thornton had stood gazing after that slim, girlish figure with the strangest sensation at his heart that he had ever experienced.

"Pshaw!" he muttered, impatiently, striking a match on the sole of his boot, and proceeding to light a cigar. "Somehow the features of that young girl's face remind me strangely of poor little Doris. Perhaps Doris would have grown into just such a superb creature, if she had lived. Can that be Miss Fielding, I wonder?" he mused.

During the remainder of the morning Frederick Thornton caught himself thinking continually of the young girl he had met in the glen.

He presented himself punctually at the villa. The doctor and his good wife, and Karl, welcomed him cordially; but the face he longed to see (if, indeed, the pretty young girl he had met *was* Miss Fielding) was not there.

"I am sorry Miss Fielding has a headache, and cannot be presented to you," said Mrs. Lancaster, smilingly. "However, this is not to be your last visit to the villa; we shall expect to see a great deal of you while you are staying in the village."

"Perhaps I have met Miss Fielding already," replied Frederick, smiling; and he proceeded to

recount the adventure of the morning, minutely describing the young girl.

"Yes, that is my husband's ward," declared Mrs. Lancaster. "How shrewd you are at guessing, my dear Mr. Thornton."

From that day Frederick Thornton found an opportunity to call every day at the villa, but by some strange chance he was never able to find the doctor's lovely young ward there. Once he fancied he saw the flutter of a white dress leaving the library by one door as he entered by another.

At last he surprised her one day by entering, quite unobserved, with Mrs. Lancaster, an hour earlier than he usually called. For a single instant the room seemed whirling around Doris. As in a dream she heard Mrs. Lancaster go through the formula of the introduction. She heard Frederick Thornton say, "I am happy to meet you, Miss Fielding," then to her dismay, Mrs. Lancaster was called away, and they were left alone together.

He had looked into her eyes, heard her voice, and had not recognized her; and she told herself, with a bitter smile, that she would never betray her identity to him—never! He should never know that she was the same Doris to whom he had been bound by that fatal midnight marriage, and who had deserted her so cruelly at the very altar almost. He had not

grieved to have the fetters that bound him to herself snapped asunder by her death, she felt sure. Of course, he was Vivian's husband long since, and could, therefore, be nothing to her now—less than nothing—and quite unconsciously her face grew cold, hard and haughty with superb scorn as he gazed at her.

At that moment Karl entered the drawing-room, and Doris took the opportunity to escape from his presence instantly.

Frederick Thornton looked after Miss Fielding in wonder not unmixed with pique. Why did this lovely young girl take such an aversion to him at first sight? Why did she avoid him so persistently? he asked himself, vexedly. He could not understand, yet, despite this knowledge, he seemed drawn as by a magnet each day to the villa.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SHADOW.

That one glance at the dark, handsome face of Frederick Thornton awakened all the old bitter-sweet memories in Doris's heart again.

She tried to avoid him, but from that hour Frederick Thornton followed Doris about like a shadow.

One evening they met at a grand ball. Doris had heard them say he would not be there. Therefore she was much surprised to see him standing by her side.

"Are you engaged for the next waltz, Miss Fielding?" he asked, taking the pearl and gold tablet from her hand.

Doris drew back, her lovely face paling. Even her lips lost their color. Waltz with *him!* Ah, no! She could not.

How could she feel his breath upon her cheek, the clasp of his strong arm around her, and know that he was another's—that he had lost her forevermore?

"I should prefer dancing any other than a waltz with you, Mr. Thornton," she said.

He certainly felt piqued. Any other young lady in that grand, glittering ball room would have been pleased to have waltzed with him, he well knew.

"May I put my name down for the next quadrille, then?" he asked, with charming grace; and as Doris could find no reasonable excuse for refusing him, she bowed a cold assent.

To her horror, she found it was, after all, a waltz-quadrille. She could not escape from him when

they were out on the floor together. She was obliged to go through the dance with him. Yet Frederick Thornton could not help but notice how she shrank from the touch of his hand and the clasp of his arm.

And again he asked himself in the deepest wonder, why had this young girl taken such an aversion to him.

That one waltz-quadrille undid the work of years. Doris had thought that she had schooled her heart against him; but love was not to be disciplined thus easily. She realized that the Doris of twenty loved handsome Frederick Thornton a thousand times more deeply than the Doris of seventeen had done. That was childish, beautiful love; this was the full, passionate strength of a woman's love—the love that blesses or curses human hearts.

From that hour Frederick Thornton followed Doris about like a shadow. He took great care to place himself in every set with her. If she strolled out on the balcony, on looking up she was sure to find him near her. If she seated herself at the piano in the grand drawing-room, she would find him at her side, ready to turn the music for her.

She curled her crimson lips in the deepest scorn as she looked at him. He had been untrue to the

memory of poor hapless Doris. *Now* he would be untrue to Vivian's memory by sunning himself in another's smiles, she told herself.

"Why was Vivian not with him?" she wondered. Then she remembered it was not unusual for gentlemen to go abroad without their wives. No doubt Vivian had not chosen to come,

There was one who looked on with darkening brow as Frederick Thornton hovered at Doris's side; one who turned away as though the sight were bitter pain to him, although he had noticed Doris did not encourage these attentions. Karl Lancaster could not endure the thought of Doris's smiling upon another.

A sudden coldness sprang up between the two young men, and Karl was pleased when his father announced his intention of returning home.

A fortnight later, the Lancasters took up their summer quarters at the Ocean Beach Hotel, Newport, and Doris was at once proclaimed the beauty and belle of the season. To Doris's dismay, Frederick Thornton followed them.

Again he sought and improved every opportunity of cultivating beautiful Miss Fielding's acquaintance. There was a certain dash of romance about it, owing to the fact the girl seemed to detest and avoid him so.

Frederick Thornton was by no means vain. Yet he was not blind to his own accomplishments, and the favor in which he was held by the charming belles who graced the beach.

It was quite useless for bewitching young girls to single him out as the handsomest and best catch of the season. He was proof against all their pretty arts of coquetry, their coy blushes and blandishments. It was soon whispered about that he had no eyes nor ears for any one save the beauty and belle, Miss Fielding. He was not to be won, that was evident.

"Why does he follow me about so persistently, I wonder?" Doris often thought to herself. It often occurred to her to warn those pretty girls that the idol they were so eager to worship was married; that he had no right to give to the world the impression that he was single—free to woo and win them.

Mrs. Lancaster watched young Mr. Thornton's persistent wooing with anxiety for her own son's sake. Once she attempted to discover the state of Doris's heart by close questioning in regard to her ardent admirer, but Doris turned such a pale, pained face toward her that she cried out in alarm.

"Do not mention Frederick Thornton's name to me. I *hate* him," she said, in a quick, stifled voice;

and before Mrs Lancaster could recover from the astonishment of witnessing this vehement outburst of passion from the usually quiet Doris, the girl had quitted the room.

That day a strange, reckless resolve came to Doris. She would cease avoiding Frederick Thornton so. She would learn to control herself better than this, that the sound of his voice, the touch of his hand, the glance of his eyes agitated her so. It almost seemed to Doris that the whole world must read her secret. She loved him!

That afternoon, when Frederick Thornton joined a group of young girls on the sea shore, among whom was Doris, he noticed with a thrill of pleasure that she did not turn and walk abruptly away as usual; and he flattered himself that the willful beauty, who had taken such an aversion to him, was beginning to look upon him more kindly.

The group of chattering young girls made way for him. He flung himself down on the white beach at Doris's feet; but the graceful, golden head, after a slight inclination, was turned proudly away from the face gazing up into her own.

"I want you to settle a dispute for us, Mr. Thornton, if you will," said a bewitching little brunette, laying a little mite of a hand, in a half-careless, half-caressing way, on his arm. "I am trying to induce

these timid girls to take a dip in the sea waves with me. I have already half persuaded Miss Fielding. If she goes, the rest will follow. Now, add your entreaties to mine, and tell them the sea waves will be delightful, this terribly warm afternoon."

Frederick Thornton looked up in swift alarm.

"I think Miss Fielding was quite right in hesitating to trust the water to-day; there is danger in its wooing. Do you see how high the breakers dash on the shore? I have been told that it betokens a swift, treacherous undercurrent."

"Oh, how cruel of you to say that, Mr. Thornton!" pouted the little brunette, who was quite an expert swimmer among the breakers, and longed to show her dexterity in battling with the huge waves. "Of course your opinion will decide Miss Fielding, and my eloquent arguing of an hour's duration has been all in vain."

"I think not," returned Doris, very quietly. "I have made up my mind to go into the surf with you."

The little brunette looked delighted; Frederick Thornton looked as he felt—much annoyed.

"Why do you wish to court danger, Miss Fielding?" he asked, in a low voice. "You can see for yourself how heavy the sea is. I beg of you do not be tempted into the surf."

Doris crested her beautiful golden head, looking down at him with cold, proud eyes. She would have gone now, even if death itself stared her in the face, just to show him how lightly she valued his opinion.

"Why do you take so much interest in this matter?" asked Doris, sharply.

The words, "Because I love you so madly," sprang to his lips; but he forced them back. This was neither the time nor the place to utter them.

He smiled, and a tender look came into his fine, dark eyes.

"Would I not lift my voice, stretch out my hands, to save a rash child from rushing headlong into danger? or turn aside from its course a bird that was seemingly bent upon fluttering straight into a trap? You are like the child and the bird; you must be saved from the fruits of your own folly."

With a haughty toss of her golden, curly head, Doris picked up her book and lace sunshade, and walked away.

Frederick looked thoughtfully out over the water. In that moment his mind had flown back to the hapless girl-bride who had found death in the cold, cruel waves. The impulse came to him to follow Miss Fielding, and tell her the story of poor, hapless little Doris. It was strange that, in the presence of this

beautiful girl, whom he had learned to love so passionately, his mind always went back to poor little Doris, who had loved him so well; Miss Fielding, in some vague way, reminded him so much, at times, of Doris, although Miss Fielding was a beauty and belle, surrounded by wealth, luxury and admirers; and little Doris was only a timid school-girl, whose girlish heart he had won unknowingly.

A half hour later, as he paced the veranda of the hotel, looking out seaward, he saw a group of bathers battling with the breakers.

His heart almost stood still. He recognized the foremost one, upon whose golden head the sunlight fell; it was Miss Fielding.

How madly the huge waves dashed over the four young girls who clung to the ropes with their slender, white hands.

"They have found the water much too rough for them; just as I predicted," he mused, strolling mechanically down the beach.

Doris saw him coming toward them, and a reck less, defiant light flamed into her blue eyes.

"I will show him how little I think of his warning," she thought, striking out fully a rod ahead of her companions.

Alas! for willful defiant, Doris, it was a fatal move. All in an instant she realized it. The great

waves carried her far out of the reach of the protecting ropes, and in a single instant more the treacherous undercurrent dragged her down.

Hoarse cries echoed from hundreds of throats as the horrified spectators realized what had happened. Before a life-boat could be put out the girl would be swept out to sea.

But in that moment of horror a young man had torn off his coat, and sprang into the waves to her rescue.

"Courage!" he shouted. "I will save you, or die!"

The young man was Frederick Thornton.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SAVED BY LOVE.

In an instant the greatest excitement prevailed. Was the young man mad, to risk his life so recklessly among the wild, dashing breakers? they asked themselves, breathlessly.

They strained their eyes and held their breath. It certainly looked as though two lives would be lost instead of one. Prayers went up from women's hearts; men muttered, hoarsely, "God strengthen

his arm!" and through the moments that followed they watched with bated breath, the intense silence broken only by the loud, hoarse murmurs of the breaker.

Frederick Thornton was young and strong, and an expert swimmer, but the odds were fearfully against him. He struck out bravely for the shining mark that was drifting out so swiftly to sea.

"Courage! courage!" he shouted to her again. "I will save you or die with you!"

Doris heard him, and the words inspired her with new life. She held out her white arms to him with a wild, piteous cry, and then a huge wave dashed over her, completely concealing her.

The mad water, hissing, boiling and churning around him, seemed to laugh in wild glee at his efforts to cheat them of their prey.

Down, down he struck after her, swifter than arrow-flight, drenched, choked, blinded by wave and spray, and an instant later he turned and struck boldly for the shore, holding the form of Doris in his arms. But reaching the shore was no easy task. The great waves beat him back, and his herculean efforts seemed to prove futile, as, sure as fate, he realized they were drifting out to sea.

He saw the life-boat that was put out, but could it reach them? Could his strength last that long?

He was strong and sinewy, yet it was no light task to hold that heavy burden with his left arm, striking boldly out with the right.

All this occurred to the girl who clung to him in pale bravery.

"Leave me, Frederick," she gasped, piteously. "It will be all you can do to save yourself."

"You think I am coward enough for that?" he cried out, with a sharp accent of pain. "You think I would save myself and let *you* perish?" And she answered, simply:

"Why not? It is all you can do. The life-boat can never reach us."

"I'll never leave you while I have life! You would be swept down in a minute. We will live or die together!" he cried, holding her fast, and battling heroically with the mad waves.

"Go!—leave me to my fate!" she panted, wildly. "Go—for *my* sake, Frederick—because I—love—you!"

And with those words she fell back in his arms in a dead faint.

Perhaps it was those words that imbued him with new life, and buoyed him up until the life-boat reached him.

Five minutes later, amidst lusty cheers and glad cries of women, Frederick Thornton laid Doris down

on the white sand among the motley throng that had assembled there.

From that hour handsome Frederick Thornton was the hero and idol of the belles of Newport.

It was a week before Doris was sufficiently recovered to venture down to the parlor to thank him for saving her life.

It was evening; the chandeliers were lighted, throwing a soft, mellow light over the marble halls and vast parlors, and out upon the stretch of beach beyond, lying so white in the clear, bright starlight.

Doris saw him out on the veranda, pacing to and fro, smoking a cigar. Silently she crossed the veranda and stood before him, like a vision in her clinging dress of soft, fleecy white.

"I am come to thank you for what you have done for me, Mr. Thornton," she said, with an unconscious flutter in her voice, extending both her hands. "I thank you so much words will not express my indebtedness. Why did you do it? It might have cost you your own life. Oh, why did you do so much for me, Mr. Thornton?"

He took both her trembling hands.

"We will walk down on the beach together, and I will tell you why," he answered.

How smooth the treacherous, smiling sea looked

under the brilliant starlight. How clear the silver moon looked, coyly hiding her sweet face behind the soft, white clouds, like a blushing bride behind her white veil. What a glamor there was over land and sea as they walked silently along under the mellow moonbeams, listening to the musical murmur of the sighing waves.

Suddenly Frederick Thornton stood still, looking down into the lovely face, his hand involuntarily closing and holding prisoner the little trembling one that lay on his arm.

"You asked my why I risked my life to save yours. I will answer you now. It was because I love you with all the strength of my heart, with all the strength of my soul. Without you, life would be a blank; with you, it would be a paradise. I love you with the mightiest love man ever felt for woman—a love that would brave all the dangers of earth and sea to win you. You told me out on the water that you—"

The sentence never was finished. Doris turned upon him like a flash.

"*Your love!*" she panted. "Heaven help the woman who believes in it. It is as false and cruel as death itself. Hush! Not another word. I will not hear it. Never speak to me again. I would put the whole world between us if I could. In daring

to speak to me of love, you have canceled the debt of gratitude I owed you."

Before Frederick Thornton could find his voice to reply, she had fled. He found himself standing alone, lost in a maze of bewilderment on the beach.

"Am I mad, or do I dream?" he cried, hoarsely. "My love—an insult! What can she mean?"

Then suddenly a strange light seemed to break in upon him. He was Banker Thornton's son, and heir to a million at his father's death; but in his own right at present he had but a moderate allowance, while Miss Fielding was already an heiress in her own right.

"Did she think I meant to woo and win her for the sake of her wealth?"

Anger and wounded pride came to his rescue, blunting the sting of her stormy words. If there was one class of men he had always detested above others it was fortune-hunters. And the thought that he should be classed as one of those despicable creatures cut to his heart like the sharp thrust of a dagger.

The next morning the deplorable news was circulated among the young ladies that Mr. Thornton had left the hotel the night before.

"Oh, how provoking!" they chorused in a breath.

"And the season at its height, too. How we shall miss him at the hops! He was a charming gallant. How provoking that the attraction was not strong enough to keep him here to the end of the season."

And more than one glance was maliciously turned toward Doris.

Doris turned quietly to the pretty blonde who had made the remark.

"Perhaps he went because the attraction elsewhere was strongest—as it should be in his case. I believe Mr. Thornton to—be—married."

"Married!" echoed the little group, in amazement. "Surely that cannot be, Miss Fielding. What reason have you for thinking so, and who is the lady?"

"Some three years ago he was betrothed to Miss Vivian Courtney. He loved her—and I have every reason to believe—married her," returned Doris, in a low, faint voice.

"Indeed you are mistaken," declared one of the group, briskly. "*He was* engaged to Miss Courtney, it is quite true, but for some unexplained reason, the marriage was broken off. He went abroad, and about that time her father died of a fit of apoplexy. A year later, after waiting in vain for her handsome lover to return and make up their quarrel, pretty, dark-eyed Vivian married a wealthy sea captain for his gold. They had anything but a happy life of it,

and at last he died, and his young widow is spending the money as fast as she can. I read in one of the society journals she was expected here this season. No doubt she has heard that her old lover is here, and is following him up. And, learning that handsome Frederick Thornton has taken French leave, taking to himself the friendly warning to 'beware of vidders.' A wise man knows better than to encourage them."

Doris listened like one turned suddenly to stone. The long porch with its groups of promenaders, the white beach and the long stretch of restless sea beyond, seemed to whirl around her. Ah, Heaven! had she heard aright, or was this a cruel mockery of the senses? Vivian and Frederick had parted—three—years—ago? Ah, surely it could not have been! They loved each other too well for that. And believing himself free to woo and win Vivian, what had come between them?

Could it be that his conscience had smitten him when he came face to face that night with the poor child-bride whom he had married only to desert, and did remorse overcome him with the knowledge she had sought death to set him free?

And was it Heaven's retribution upon him, she wondered, that he should meet her again, and know-

ing her not,—she was so changed in name, face and fortune—fall desperately in love with her?

That he did love her now, she could not doubt! Had he not periled his life for hers? Was there ever a stronger test of love than that? And she had sent him away—oh, cruel, cruel!

And yet, the spirit of that other Doris called out to her for vengeance! He must suffer as she had suffered. He must feel, pang for pang, the cruel torture of unrequited love, such as she had felt in the horror of that never-to-be-forgotten hour when kindly strangers, pitying her youth and her friendlessness, had broken the heart-rending truth to her —that he had forsaken her.

CHAPTER XXX.

PARTED AGAIN.

"When I forget the past, then I will forgive him —never until then," Doris thought, bitterly.

She tried to take up the old life again; tried to be as happy as she was before Frederick Thornton crossed her path for the second time. But it was

a task beyond her accomplishment. A voice was forever crying out to her:

"You have won his love *at last*. Why did you break his heart and your own too, by sending him away from you?"

The thought that poor, hapless Doris of the past was avenged brought her no comfort. Should she write to him and recall him? He was still her husband; yes, her husband! Her heart gave a great, sudden thrill at the thought.

"No, no, she would not recall him. Her pride rebelled against this. He should not have gone away so hastily.

The following week, among the new arrivals, came the charming young widow, Vivian Carsdale. That evening, for the first time since that cruel event, which had happened three long years before, Vivian and Doris met again, face to face. Vivian turned a ghastly white, even under her plentiful supply of pearl rouge.

"Who is that young girl?" she cried, incoherently, turning to one of the ladies standing near, and indicating Doris.

"That? Why, Miss Fielding—the belle of Newport!" returned her companion, gazing admiringly after Doris's tall, slim, graceful figure. "Why, how

white you look, Mrs. Carsdale! What can be the matter? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I almost imagine I have," retorted Vivian, turning abruptly away.

"Was there ever a face so like?" muttered Vivian, when she found herself alone in her own boudoir. "If I did not know that Doris was sleeping under the waves, I should say that the girl is Doris, older, and grown taller, with the same features, yet a thousand times more beautiful."

She took great care to place herself near Doris the next day, where she could listen to her voice, observe every play of those mobile features; and again it struck Vivian as to how like this girl's voice was to that of Doris.

In that same hour these two, whose paths had crossed each other so strangely, were presented to each other.

"You remind me so strangely of one whom I used to know," said Vivian, sweetly, "that, do you know, I am almost lost in wonder sometimes, the similarity is so striking."

She was watching Doris narrowly, and saw the flash and the look of confusion that crossed her lovely face.

The more Vivian talked to Miss Fielding, the

more a certain wild idea that had taken possession of her became strengthened in her mind.

Very ingeniously Vivian led the conversation around to education.

"Where were *you* educated, Miss Fielding?" she asked, suddenly.

And almost instantly, without stopping to think, Doris had uttered the fatal words that sprang to her lips:

"At Madame Delmar's seminary, Beech Grove, Maryland."

Vivian uttered a little stifling scream. All her doubts now verged into assurances. With lightening-like rapidity, she turned upon the shrinking girl before her. No change of appearance, nothing in this world, could have veiled Doris's indentity from the rival who had hated her with such a bitter hatred three long years ago.

"I know you. You cannot deceive *me*," she cried, shrilly. "You are Doris Brandon, the girl who stole my lover from me, because I trusted you to deliver a letter to him. You are not dead, then. You have risen from the grave to come between us again. Now that I think of it, the body supposed to have been drowned was never found. Why are you here sailing under false colors? *Miss*

Fielding, indeed! You shall be denounced as an impostor before to-morrow's sun rises."

Like a whirlwind, she turned and left Doris standing stunned, dazed, bewildered, on the sunlit veranda. Like one suddenly stricken blind, she slowly groped her way to her own room.

"What did Vivian intend to do?" she asked herself, with a great gasping sob. Had it been such a terrible sin, when—

"Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery,"

in a frantic moment she had flung herself into the water?

She knew how bitterly such an action would be condemned—that the verdict of the world would be—No matter how hard she had found life, she should have taken up her cross with patience and resignation.

This, then, was what Vivian meant; and more, having been saved from a watery grave, she should have let that fact become known. What if, believing her dead, Frederick Thornton had married again? He would have been innocent of all wrong intent before the Great White Throne, and *she*—yes, she—would have to answer for it before an offended God. She could see now that it had been all

wrong, keeping the fact that she still lived from her husband.

That he did not love her was no excuse. She saw it all now in quite a different light from what she had ever thought of it before.

What a sensation there would be on the morrow, when Vivian revealed all. All the world would know that she was a forsaken bride; that the man she had married had deserted her at the very altar almost. And they would say, too, that, in after years, when the child-bride (whom he had married so hastily, repenting of the rash deed even while the solemn marriage service was being uttered) was changed beyond recognition, she threw herself in his way under an assumed name, won his love, and trampled it under her feet. This had been her plan of vengeance, and a most ignoble vengeance it had been.

"Yes, they would say all that of me!" moaned Doris, "and I could never endure that."

Sooner or later the story would reach Frederick Thornton's ears, and, oh, how shocked he would be.

"Better that he should hear this from me than from the lips of a stranger," muttered Doris, pacing excitedly up and down her room, wringing her little white jeweled hands then pressing them tightly over her throbing heart. "Yes, yes, I will

write to him, confessing all; then I will go away so far he can never find me."

Seating herself before her writing-desk, with trembling hand and face as white as death, she began her letter to Frederick Thornton.

It was a long, closely-written letter, blotted with heavy, splashing tears.

In it, she went back to that fatal night when she followed him and Vivian through the grounds of the villa, and had suddenly sprung out before them, throwing off her disguise, crying out that she, his mother's companion, was the bride he had wedded, only to cruelly desert.

And how, in the intense excitement of the moment, she had turned from him, without waiting to hear one word of defence, if he had any to make for such an action, and had flung herself headlong into the waves. How she had been saved from death, and had made her way to the great, cruel city of New York, where the accident befell her from which Karl Lancaster was instrumental in rescuing her.

She also told him of the great discovery that had ensued—that *she*, the poor little dependent, who had suffered all the pangs of poverty, was an heiress—the daughter of Hulbert Brandon Fielding, an English milord.

She told how the impulse to confess who she was had been strong upon her when, after an absence of three long years, she had suddenly met him abroad that day. And how, seeing he did not recognize her, because she had changed so greatly during the length of time that had intervened, she had made up her mind never to reveal her identity, come what might. Also of the idea that had taken possession of her that, loving Vivian as he had loved her in the past, and believing himself free, no doubt he had wedded her. She had been of this opinion when they were talking together out on the sands on that night he left Newport so suddenly.

She then told of her subsequent discovery that he had parted from Vivian forever on that fatal night three years ago; and of Vivian's arrival at the hotel, and how she had recognized her, declaring that on the morrow the whole world should know her story.

"I could never endure that," she wrote, piteously, "and so I am going away—going so far that no one who has ever looked upon my face will ever behold me again.

"Vivian accuses me of endeavoring to come between you and her again. This I earnestly, solemnly declare is untrue. It is this which sends me into exile.

"Knowing that I am the same Doris whom you once so despised, I know you will cease to think kindly of her whom you knew as Miss Fielding.

"When we were out breasting the mad waves together—when you were periling your life to save mine—again the impulse was strong within me to cry out that I was Doris—poor, unhappy Doris; but, with the words on my lips, I fell back into a deep swoon. Death must have ensued had not your strong arms borne me to safety.

"Forget and forgive me if you can. We shall never meet again. The world is wide. I wrecked your life once. I cannot wreck it a second time.

"Farewell forever. Your unhappy, DORIS."

With hands cold as death Doris sealed her letter, addressed it, and took it down to the mail box in the office.

"Now," she said, as she stood again in her own room," nothing is left for me to do but go quietly away, secretly and alone. When Vivian tells her story, they will not find me here."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A STRANGE REVELATION.

Great was Mrs. Lancaster's surprise to receive a hurriedly-written note from Doris the next morning stating she had been called suddenly away, and would write to her when she reached her destination.

"I cannot understand this strange freak of Doris," exclaimed Mrs. Lancaster, in amazement, as she passed the note over to her husband.

"Where do you suppose Doris has gone?" she cried. "It seems almost incredible to believe. Left Newport—and the season at its height—without one word as to why or where she was going. I really cannot comprehend it; can you?"

"I never attempt to comprehend a woman's motives," returned her husband, laconically. "It would be a useless waste of time and thought."

Vivian Carsdale heard of Doris's departure with a strange smile on her lips. She, and she alone,

understood her sudden flight. She did not make known poor Doris's story as she had threatened to do. She had merely meant to frighten the girl into acknowledging her indentity. Now that her rival was vanquished, she could afford to hold her peace.

There was great disappointment among the young ladies over Doris's sudden departure, for she was a general favorite, and this piqued Vivian exceedingly.

Very adroitly she set herself to the task of unraveling what seemed to her a wonderful mystery—as to how poor, dependent Doris had become a great heiress, and was known as Miss Fielding. Little by little she drew from Mrs. Lancaster the story of her son Karl's adventure and his romantic meeting with Doris, and their discovery subsequently that she was the long-lost heiress whom they had been seeking. She had been identified, beyond a doubt, as the daughter of Hulbert Brandon Fielding.

"But her past life?" said Vivian, eagerly. "Did she ever—"

"She told me very little of her past life," interrupted Mrs. Lancaster. "Doris did not like to talk about it."

Vivian knew, when she heard that, that Doris had never revealed, then, that strange chapter in her past life.

"It is a wonder that Mr. Thornton, the banker's

son, who left the hotel recently, and Miss Fielding, did not mane a match," laughed Vivian. "I hear that he was so much in love with her."

"Doris took a strange dislike to him," responded Mrs. Lancaster. "He was all that was gallant and handsome, following her around like a shadow. Yet she avoided him whenever it was possible."

"I should not have thought that would have pleased your son, Mrs. Lancaster," laughed Vivian roguishly; "for, if report speaks truly, *he* has hopes in that direction."

"Doris always declares she will never marry, so all hope would be useless in that direction," said Karl's mother.

And at that moment the entrance of Karl himself put a stop to all further conversation on that topic.

Newport, even in all its gayety, would not have attracted Vivian thither had it not been for the hope of seeing Frederick Thornton again, and the wild delusion of fanning the old love into flame. The shock of coming face to face with Doris, whom she believed to be dead, had been a great and terrible blow to her, and she had realized, with this living barrier between them, that Frederick was indeed lost to her forever.

Yet it was with a feeling of intense satisfaction she nad realized that, owing to the great and sur-

prising change in Doris, he had failed to recognize her. It was no wonder.

The Doris he had known in that past was but a timid slip of a school-girl; the Miss Fielding he had met in later years was a society belle and a beauty.

What strange fate had brought them together again, and parted them more widely than before?

"This is the second time that girl has come between me and Frederick Thornton's love!" groaned Vivian, desperately, as she paced the floor of her room excitedly.

Meanwhile the days dragged slowly by; the weeks lengthened into a month, and as yet not a line had been received from Doris.

Karl Lancaster and his mother were growing uneasy over the matter, while the old doctor declared that his capricious young ward was abundantly able to take care of herself. No need of anxiety; Doris must return soon, for her supply of pocket money, which she had taken with her, would not last forever. Buoyed up with this hope, they waited patiently; but not so much as a line, revealing Doris's whereabouts, reached them.

But let us follow Doris's letter written that night to Frederick Thornton, and see what became of it. Traveling about from place to place as he was, it was a difficult matter for mail to reach him. It

was quite six weeks ere Doris's letter fell into his hands.

He looked at the square white envelope, which, by its many crossed-out directions, seemed to have followed him about so persistently, with curious eyes, wondering who his new correspondent could be.

"The best way to find out would be to open and see," he thought, suiting the action to the word.

He saw it was a long, closely-written letter, blotted by tears.

"It looks like Miss Fielding's writing," he cried, quickly turning over the page. "Why, it *is* from Miss Fielding," he muttered, catching his breath hard.

Like a man in a dazed, bewildered dream, Frederick Thornton read the startling letter through from beginning to end. What was it this letter told him? Was he mad or dreaming? Doris, his little, neglected bride, whom he had mourned as dead, and Miss Fielding were one and the same! Oh, impossible! There was some terrible mistake!

Again and again he read the letter through. Yes, here it was, in black and white, as plain as written words could make it, every incident brought up and lucidly explained. Great drops of perspiration stood out on his face, and his hands trembled, strong

man though he was. But one thought filled heart and brain. He could claim Doris Fielding; she was his wife. *Now* he realized why he had been so strangely attracted toward her from the first.

Had he been blind that he had not noticed her great resemblance to the young bride from whom fate had parted him so strangely in that bitter past?

The revelation was wonderful to him.

He would lose no time in hurrying back to Newport to see Doris, and explain to her that which she had not given him time to explain on that fatal night—the innocent cause that had parted them, wrecking two lives.

How he would kneel at her feet, and tell her how he had mourned the young bride whom he had lost so cruelly—mourned for her, refusing to be comforted; and how the first sight of *her* face, which had reminded him so strangely of Doris, had thrilled anew the heart he had believed dead.

Despite her coldness and aversion (and Heaven knows, under the cruel mistake she was laboring under, he well knew she had reason to abhor him, innocent though he had been of any thought of deserting his poor little bride), he believed she still loved him.

Through his brain flashed the desperate cry that had fallen from her lips when they had faced death together in the mad surf:

"Save yourself, Frederick! Never mind me! You must not give up your life uselessly for me! Oh, save yourself for my sake—because I love you!"

Six long weeks the letter—this precious letter—had been following him about.

What must Doris think because she had received no reply? Should he telegraph her that it had only been received within the hour?

No, no! It would be better to go on and see her in person. No telegram could tell one-half of what he had to say to her.

But one eastward-bound express stopped at the little village where he was staying, and that was at six in the evening. It was not yet noon. How should he pass the intervening hours? Frederick Thornton asked himself.

One heart in that quiet village was fiery and restless enough as the hours rolled by. One man paced its streets with impatience, because the warm day would not go more quickly. He counted the hours. There were still two to pass; then the train would arrive.

It seemed to him the sun was slow in setting; his watch was behind time; the train must be an hour

late. He must do something to while away the hours until then. He could do nothing. It was impossible to detach his mind from her. He could think of nothing but the strange revelation contained in Doris's letter.

Like one dazed, he paced up and down the streets. The sun or moon might be shining; the earth be green or brown beneath his feet; the trees be bare or full of leaf. He knew nothing, saw nothing, understood nothing but this:

He was going to see Doris again—his beautiful, peerless Doris, that had blossomed from such a frail bud into such a magnificent flower—and claim her as his wife.

Men and women and children looked curiously at him as he passed along with his handsome, absorbed face. They were nothing to him—the whole world was nothing—for he was going back to claim his beautiful young bride.

The two hours must be lived through somehow.

At last the longed-for whistle of the incoming train from afar off fell upon his ear.

"Thank Heaven!" muttered Frederick. "This has been the longest day I have ever experienced in my life."

How slow the train seemed to drag along,

It almost seemed to Frederick Thornton that he could walk as swiftly.

The night waned at last, and the golden sun rose on a new-born day.

It was fully nine in the morning ere the train steamed into the Newport depot.

Frederick took a cab, and lost no time in reaching the Ocean Beach Hotel.

"Were the Lancasters here yet, and their ward?" he asked eagerly of the hotel clerk.

Karl Lancaster, who had entered the office unperceived, stepped forward in person to answer his queries.

"We—that is, my father and mother and I—are still here; but Miss Fielding has gone," he said, slowly.

"Gone!" echoed Frederick; and he gasped out the word as though it was the last he should ever speak. "Where has she gone, Karl?"

A strange flush passed over Karl Lancaster's face.

"You *must* tell me!" Frederick cried. "I must see her!"

Karl Lancaster looked into his friend's pale, excited face without replying.

"I have the right to know, Karl," he went on, huskily. "I may as well tell you what all the world must soon know. Doris is my wife!"

And, in a few brief words, he told Karl all, finishing by putting Doris's letter in his hand.

Karl Lancaster's amazement can better be imagined than described.

"Now you will tell me where Doris has gone, Karl," he cried, hoarsely. "I cannot rest night or day until I have seen her."

"Heaven help you to bear what I must tell you, Frederick," said Karl; "but you must bear it bravely like a man.

"Doris has gone," he went on, huskily. "We do not know where to. She went away suddenly six weeks ago without saying where she was going, leaving no address behind her. She left a note, merely saying, when she arrived at her destination she would write. We have not heard from her since. We have written to all her friends, but we could not trace her whereabouts."

A cry that was hardly human in its anguish fell from Frederick Thornton's lips.

"Gone!" he repeated. "Gone! Oh, Heaven!"

How dark the sky looked. How the light seemed to fade from the sun. He stood before Karl panting, gasping, dismayed. Karl could see the strong, troubled heart-beats in his cheeks and his neck. He could see the strong hands tremble like weak leaves in the wind.

DOWN THE LAWN STRODE A TALL FIGURE.—*See Chapter XXXVII.*

Something like the truth flashed over Frederick Thornton. After writing that letter, which she knew full well would bring him at once to Newport, she had gone hurriedly away to avoid him, leaving no address behind her by which she could be traced.

"How she must abhor me to have done that," he thought, bitterly.

The blow that Karl Lancaster had received in the knowledge that Doris belonged to another, was a heavy and sore one; but he bravely put all thought of self from him and strove to comfort his friend.

"The season here is drawing to a close. We would have been away two weeks ago, had it not been for the vain hope that Doris might return," said Karl. "We leave here for New York to-day. Will you not come with us?"

Most of the summer guests had gone; there was nothing to stay for, and Frederick sorrowfully consented.

Great was the consternation of both Dr. Lancaster and his wife when they heard Frederick Thornton's strange story—more pitiful than the most pathetic romance could have been.

He told them everything—omitting no detail—of how he had first met pretty, timid Doris by accident in the seminary grounds; how their

acquaintance had ripened into friendship in the days that followed, and through pity for the lonely life of the beautiful, desolate child (for she was little more than that), he had invited her to the grand ball.

He described the sternness of Madame Delmar toward poor Doris, and Doris's fear lest the madame would refuse to allow her to go.

"'Then do not ask her,' I rejoined," continued Frederick. "I said, 'Why refuse yourself two hours of pleasure? You, who have had so little enjoyment in your young life? Come, it would be a decided lark to cheat madame.' I counseled with all a young fellow's impulsive thoughtlessness, and poor little Doris listened.

"'The gates of the seminary close at ten; could I get back by that time, do you think, Mr. Frederick?' questioned Doris, dubiously, yet with all a young girl's eagerness and love of mischief, raising her laughing blue eyes to mine.

"I assured her, on my honor as a gentleman, she should be back by ten. The gates should never be closed against her; I would hold myself responsible for that," continued Frederick, brushing his white hand over his damp forehead.

"Well, the upshot of the matter was, that little Doris and I went that night to the grand ball, Mrs.

Lancaster. It was her first ball, and you know with what keen zest a young girl always enjoys her first ball. It seemed like a glimpse of Heaven to her.

"The hours flew by unheeded, and to make a long story short, we returned to the seminary just in time to see the heavy gates closed in our faces.

"I shall never forget the poignant grief of poor little Doris," said Frederick, huskily; "how she wept, laying her pretty face down against the cold stones, and wringing her little white hands, declaring that madame would turn her away from the institute on the morrow for what she had done—just as sure as fate. And, oh, how piteously the poor child cried out that she could never—never face the great, cold, cruel world, and she wished she had died before she ever consented to go to the ball.

"I said, 'Little Doris, it was all my fault. With me rests the responsibility of the affair. You shall not be thrown on the mercy of the cold world. There is one way of preventing it, and that is to marry me, Doris.'

"'Are you really in earnest, Mr. Frederick?' she gasped, looking up in dismay at me through her tears.

"'Of course I am, Doris,' I replied. 'You shall be my bride within an hour, if you will.'

"There had been no wooing, no courtship. I

never kissed the pretty white face until I stood beside Doris that night at the altar, and she was pronounced my bride.

"We took the midnight train for Baltimore, arriving there late the next forenoon. And now I am coming to the most pitiful part of my story, Mrs. Lancaster. When you know it all it will be easier for you to try to reconcile Doris and me—when she is found—if you will undertake so difficult a task."

"Of course I will," she replied, heartily; "you may be quite sure of that."

Now that she knew that Doris was lost to her own son Karl forever, her next thought was to see her husband's ward happy; for she loved Doris with a true, motherly affection.

"I had reached the climax of my story when I told you that on the wedding trip Doris and I went to Baltimore, arriving there at about noon.

"Leaving her by herself to rest the short hour before luncheon, I left her, strolling out into the street for the ostensible purpose of smoking a cigar, smiling as I recalled poor little Doris's words:

"'Don't be quite an hour, please, Mr. Frederick, for I shall be so lonely until you return.'

"It sounded to me more like a child's speech than

a woman's; but, then, my little bride was but a child, after all—she was only seventeen.

"I had not walked far—I was just crossing the walk—when suddenly I felt a terrible blow from behind on my head. One terrible groan of agony burst from my lips, and I knew no more.

"When I regained consciousness I found myself lying upon a cot bed in the hospital.

"With consciousness—it was found my memory was completely shattered—all remembrance of Doris, the bride who must have waited for me in such terror and agony, was completely obliterated from my mind. I had forgotten all about my sudden marriage—forgotten Doris completely."

CHAPTER XXXII.

BREAKING THE NEWS.

A cry of compassion broke from Mrs. Lancaster's lips; great tears stood in her eyes which she vainly endeavored to control. Her heart was moved to its very depths by Frederick Thornton's pathetic story.

"I had my father telegraphed for at once, when

I discovered where I was," continued Frederick, "and I was removed to my home, and there nursed back to health and strength; but through it all there always existed a strange blank in my mind. There seemed to be some thought always struggling in my brain, of something important which I had forgotten; but try hard as I would, I could not recall whatever it was that had eluded my memory.

"At length, being thrown in contact with an old sweetheart of mine, I formed an attachment for her, and asked her to be my wife, little dreaming that I was not free to woo and win her. The wedding-day was set, and the arrangements for the marriage went steadily on."

"Oh, Mr. Thornton," cried Mrs. Lancaster, with a gasp of horror, "surely Heaven intervened to save you from such an awful step as this second marriage would have been."

"Heaven *did* interfere to save me, and save all concerned in that step," replied Frederick, reverently; "and it happened in a most uncommon manner.

"My mother had engaged the services of a young companion, a timid creature, dark of skin, whose features were almost concealed by a pair of glasses.

"I cannot explain to you the strange sensation that passed over me as I first gazed at this young

girl; then an uncomfortable idea took possession of me. It seemed to me this strange creature was continually dogging my footsteps, especially whenever I was with my fiancée.

"One starlight evening, while we were walking in the grounds, I bent my head to kiss my fiancée, when suddenly, like an electric shot, this creature sprang from the screening bushes out into the path before us, and dashing the glasses from her eyes, criedly out wildly:

"'I cannot endure this longer. I shall go mad—yes, mad. Look into my face, and, despite the disguise that I have assumed, know that I am Doris, the bride whom you wedded and deserted at the very altar almost. You could never marry another while I, your neglected, deserted bride, lived, for in the sight of God's laws and man's you are mine—my husband. But I am not going to live to be a barrier between you and happiness!' she cried out, in a sudden wail of frenzy. 'I am going to die, to set you free!'

"All in a moment, while she was making this horrible charge, memory returned to me like a flash. Heaven help me! I remembered all; and the suddenness of the horrible shock, and the crumbling precipice upon which I stood, held me spell-bound—speechless—dazed.

"Those wild words recalled my scattered senses. 'What would you do, Doris?' I gasped. Only a faint cry of bitter agony answered me, and before I had time to utter one word of explanation—before I could say that I was an innocent man, upon whom disease had left the fatal mark of complete loss of memory as to the past—she had turned like a flash in the path, and sped toward the glittering river that lay beyond. I saw her disappear. I thought I heard a splash. But when, in agony too great for words, I reached the river brink, there was no trace of my poor Doris.

"I was like a man driven mad. I had the river dragged. I did everything to recover the body; but all to no avail.

"To my own family and the family of my fiancée the pitiful story was known. It went no further, as secrecy under the existing circumstances was deemed advisable. Of course the intended marriage was broken off, the public never knew why.

"I went abroad for three long and weary years, traveled incessantly—seeking only to forget. Never was a young man's life blighted by so pitiful a tragedy. And the bitterest drop in my cup of woe was my belief that poor Doris went to her death believing I had cruelly, willfully deserted her; bear in mind she had given me no time to explain.

"For three long years I mourned for Doris, telling myself my heart was buried in her grave. And this brings me back to the time, Mrs. Lancaster, when I met you and your husband's ward abroad.

"You will not wonder that I did not recognize in Miss Fielding my lost Doris, when you remember that I had every reason to believe my poor Doris dead.

"The great change in her personal appearance (for she had grown from a childish little creature to a beautiful young woman), taller, perhaps, by half a head, and the change in name, would have deceived any man.

"Even under these circumstances my heart was drawn irresistibly towards her again. My very soul seemed to go forward to meet her. She seemed to fill an empty place in my life.

"In the depths of my heart I still loved my poor lost Doris as devotedly as ever—but still another thought was continually striving for supremacy in heart and brain, and that thought was—life in the future would not be worth living if it could not be shared with Miss Fielding for my wife. What troubled me most was her apparent dislike—nay, abhorrence of me; it piqued, annoyed, surprised me.

"Despite her coldness, her anger, I followed her

to Newport, as you know, and each day my love for her grew more intense. On the night I saved her from death in the surf, I asked her to be my wife, and confessed my love for her.

"But as the words fell from my lips, she turned on me like a flash.

"'*Your love!*' she cried, vehemently. 'There is nothing so false under the light of heaven as your love. God pity the woman who puts faith in your love, Frederick Thornton. It would end in a broken heart.'

"And ere I could recover my voice to utter one word of protest, she was gone.

"For an hour or more I stood motionless on the white sands, trying to look my future in the face, and attempting to solve the problem as to why she should utter those words. Did she know the story of my poor, lost Doris from Doris's point of view? I asked myself, in the greatest bewilderment.

"That night I left Newport, determined to never look upon her face again. And after six weeks of wandering about from place to place, the letter written by Doris, and which you have just read, reached me.

"My great agitation and unspeakable joy at the revelation it made you can better imagine than I can describe, Mrs. Lancaster," said Frederick, with tears

that were no shame to his noble manhood, standing in his eyes. "Miss Fielding and Doris one and the same! I thought I had suddenly gone mad. I must be dreaming.

"I could not rest until I should see Doris again and explain all, and claim my darling bride, dearer now than ever to me.

"When I came here and found her gone, none knew whither, the bitter anguish, the sorrow, the despair of it was more than I could bear. I *must* find Doris; I will move heaven and earth but what I shall find her."

"You have my warmest sympathy, Mr. Thornton," replied Mrs. Lancaster. "It would give me the greatest pleasure to see two hearts that Heaven intended for each other reunited—it would indeed. Sooner or later Doris will communicate with us, and, rest assured, dear Frederick, no time shall be lost in restoring her to your arms."

How little either of them knew of the tragic event that was to happen ere they looked again on poor, hapless Doris's face. It was well for Frederick Thornton he did not know what the future held in store for him.

The next day saw the Lancaster party *en route* for their New York home, Frederick accompanying them. Two days later he arrived at Thornton Villa.

There was great rejoicing at the return of the handsome son of the house. Trixy, his younger sister, had fairly smothered him with kisses.

"I hope you have come home to stay now, my son," said Mrs. Thornton. "Ah! my boy, the happiest day of my life would be on the day I could see you married and settled down. Are you still faithful to little Doris's memory?"

"Hush, mother!" warned Trixy, in a whisper. "Don't break the startling news to him too soon."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE HAND OF FATE.

When Doris fled precipitately from the hotel, she took the first outgoing train, heeding not, caring not, in which direction she went.

Long hours passed by, and on through the sunlight whirled the New York express. Doris sat at the window, gazing fixedly out at the changing landscape, yet seeing nothing. It was like one long dream to her. She could hardly collect her thoughts. She could hardly realize what had happened, or where she was going. Her brain whirled.

Her eyes burned so that she could hardly close them. Her thoughts were all fancied and unreal.

At last the train steamed into the Grand Central depot, and the next moment Doris stood on the crowded platform quite alone.

"Cab, Miss?" said the porters, as they hurried by.

More than one passenger stood still to look curiously at the white, beautiful face, with the vague and frightened eyes.

"Cab, Miss?" repeated the man. "Take you to any part of the city."

Doris tried to answer him. What was this strange, deathly sensation that was stealing over her? The man's voice seemed far off and indistinct. Dense darkness shut out his face from her view. She threw up her hands with a little cry, and staggered forward, and would have fallen to the platform if the man had not caught her in his arms just in time.

"Great Moses! Give us a hand here," he cried out to one of his companions. "A young woman here has fainted. Some one come and take her off my hands," he bawled. "I've a whole coach-load of passengers waitin' for me. Come here, somebody, and attend to this gal."

It was one of the railroad officials who responded. What followed immediately after, Doris never knew. Long weeks afterward she awoke to con-

sciousness in the hospital to which she had been taken, nameless, friendless, sick unto death, utterly desolate—she, the petted heiress, the caressed darling of wealth and luxury.

She looked up in wonder at the kindly face bending over her.

"Where am I?" she asked, in wonder, gazing blankly around her, "and who are you?"

The nurse laid her cool hand on the feverish brow.

"You are in the hospital, my dear," she answered. "I am your nurse. You have been very ill, indeed."

"In the hospital!" echoed Doris. "Is it possible I have been ill? Did they bring me here when I fainted away yesterday?"

The nurse laughed.

"It was a good many yesterdays ago," she answered. "I have attended you for quite six weeks, my dear."

Doris fell back on her pillow with a gasp of the most intense surprise.

"You are not to talk now, my child," the nurse went on, decisively. "It wouldn't take much to have a relapse of brain fever again. Here, take this medicine, and you will have a nice, long, refreshing sleep; and after you wake up you shall tell me who you are, and where your relatives live, that they may be communicated with."

Doris turned her face to the wall with a hard, dry sob.

"I have no relatives on the face of the earth," she answered, drearily; "no, not one."

The old nurse looked shocked.

"So young and so utterly friendless! Can it be possible?" she thought, pityingly.

All efforts on the following day to learn the address of Doris's friends proved futile.

"I do not wish them to know where I am," she answered. "I am never going back to the old life again."

"Every life has its own secrets," responded the old nurse. "You know best, child, if your action is right or wrong."

"Yes; I know best," replied Doris, wearily.

She was young and strong, and during the fortnight that followed the work of convalescence went on rapidly.

"You will soon be quite your old self again," declared the old nurse, encouragingly. "But you seem to have lost all heart. That is not right. I have seen in my experience as hospital nurse many a young girl who was brought in to us, and who was not half as ill as you were, die."

"If life had as little charm for them as it has for me, perhaps they were not sorry to go," said Doris.

"Oh, my dear! my dear! those are hard words to hear from the lips of a young girl," said the nurse, shaking her head solemnly. "To youth the world should be gay and bright."

"It could never be gay and bright to one who has passed through so much as I have," sighed Doris. "No young girl ever had such a fate as mine."

"Every one thinks their own fate hardest to bear," said the nurse; "but if they only knew of the fate of others, they would think their own happy, indeed, compared to it. Why, if I should tell you some of the pitiful cases that came under my observation when I was nurse in the Baltimore hospital—before I came to New York—you would never make that remark again. Did you speak?"

Doris had dropped back on her pillow with a low, shuddering moan.

"You spoke—of—Baltimore," murmured Doris. "I—I never hear the name of that place mentioned without suffering the keenest pain. The greatest sorrow of my life came to me there."

"Try to forget it, my dear," advised the nurse, soothingly.

"I wish to Heaven I *could* forget!" sobbed Doris, bitterly.

"I will tell you some little anecdotes of others

that will help you to forget," said the nurse, drawing up her chair close by the couch. "You will get so interested in other people's woes that you will quite forget your own."

A sad smile hovered around Doris's lovely mouth.

"One of the saddest cases that ever came under my observation was that of a young man who was brought to the Baltimore hospital one morning. He was a victim to a street accident that had just occurred. A pair of runaway horses had nearly trampled him to death as he was crossing the walk."

"I do not want to hear about it," said Doris. "It would only make me sad. Tell me of something more cheerful. A touching, pitiful story always brings tears to my eyes."

"But this one is so strangely romantic," persisted the nurse, "so like the page of a novel, that you could not help feeling interested in it."

To gratify the old nurse, who seemed bent upon telling this story, Doris at last consented to listen.

"I shall at least forget the darkness and coldness of my own past, and the desolation of the future, while she is relating it," she thought, with a weary smile.

How little Doris dreamed, as she commenced her

story, how vitally interested she was in it, and that this hour would be the turning point of her life.

"As I was saying," continued the nurse, "the young man who was brought into the Baltimore hospital that morning was suffering from a severe blow on the head, produced by a plunging, runaway horse. I remember it all quite as well as though it happened yesterday; and it was almost four years ago.

"The doctors all declared the poor fellow would not live. How sorry I felt for him. He was so young and so handsome; stricken down without warning in a single instant.

"He is some mother's idolized son—some young girl's lover," I sighed, as I bent over him, gently pushing the dark, damp curls back from his white forehead.

"There was not a line about him by which he could be identified.

"But, contrary to the doctors' expectations, he *did* live—though the terrible siege of brain fever through which he passed would have killed many another man less strongly constituted; yet, even with returning health, the danger was by no means past. It was feared his reason would be impaired, the blow over the base of the brain had been such a terrible one. The decision the doctors arrived

at was quite correct,—the poor fellow's reason was but partially restored. He could not recollect what brought him to Baltimore, or, indeed, events that had happened for some time back, otherwise his brain was clear enough.

"'There seems to be some strange, undefined thought ever striving for recognition in my brain, nurse,' he would often say to me; 'something that I ought to do seems weighing on my mind, but I cannot think what it is.

"'Do not try,' I advised. 'It is probably only some sick fancy. No doubt, if it is anything very important, it will come back to your memory sooner or later.'

"'I wish I could throw off the weight of depression at will,' he answered, with a sad smile and a dreamy look in his dark eyes. 'I have often heard of men who have been haunted by some lost thought for long years, and I always laughed heartily at the notion. Now I am a victim to a phantom thought myself.'

"I never shall forget the day his father came for him to take him home. There were tears in the eyes of the proud old banker as he extended his hand to me.

"'You have nursed my son through a long and dangerous illness,' he said. 'I am more indebted

to you than words can express. If I can be of service to you at any time in life, you have but to call upon me,' he added, warmly. 'Your careful nursing, I firmly believe, has been the direct cause of saving my son Frederick's life.'

"Why, are you ill?" cried the old nurse, springing to Doris's side.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FREDERICK THORNTON'S WIFE.

"How foolish I am to be so agitated at the name —Frederick," thought Doris, recovering her composure by a violent effort. "Of course there is more than one 'Frederick' in the world."

Ah, how she loved the handsome young husband whom she was, even then, hiding from.

All her wealth seemed dross to her, because she had missed Frederick Thornton's love.

By a great effort Doris collected her scattered thoughts, and listened to what the old nurse was saying:

"Are you ill, child? Why, you are as white as a ghost."

"No, I am not ill," replied Doris; "it was only a sudden pain at my heart. Pray go on; I am listening to your story."

And the old nurse did go on with the strange revelation that was to change the current of two lives.

"As I was saying," she continued, "the whole family of the rich banker was very grateful for the excellent care I had taken of handsome Mr. Frederick, and I grew to know them well—so well that when I was transferred from Baltimore to the New York hospital, I stopped a week at their beautiful home.

"And it was then that I heard the tragic story that has darkened poor Mr. Frederick's life ever since the hour of that fatal sickness."

Doris was beginning to feel strangely interested in the narrative. She could not tell why. She was listening intently, her little hands locked tightly together in her lap, her large blue eyes never leaving the old nurse's face.

"I told you of the blank in poor Mr. Frederick's mind when he left the hospital," she continued, "and of something which he felt had escaped from his memory, try hard as he would to recall it. He could not even remember what had brought him to Baltimore, or why he was there."

"Yes, you told that before," said Doris, impatient at the repetition.

"Upon that hangs the tragedy which followed," answered the nurse, wiping a tear from her eye with her long white apron.

"Poor Mr. Frederick went back to his home, and his mother and sisters and his old sweetheart, who was visiting there, gave the idol of the family a royal welcome. It was almost like having him back from the grave—he had been so near the borders of eternity.

"This sweetheart was a pretty, dark-eyed girl, who thought a heap of Master Frederick, and the great fuss she made over his return flattered his vanity, of course. He never knew before quite how much she cared for him.

"When he asked her to marry him, and she consented, nothing could have pleased his family more.

"The day was set for the wedding, the bride's trousseau was ordered, the invitations for the grand wedding were given out, and the day set for the marriage was fast drawing near.

"Then, suddenly, and without warning, the strangest event happened that ever happened in any young man's life.

"One evening, while walking with his sweet-

heart, he was suddenly confronted by a young and beautiful girl, who claimed him as her husband.

A great gasp broke from Doris's white lips; but the old nurse, not heeding it, went on, slowly:

"The girl young claimed him, crying out that she had tracked him down at last—the young husband who had married her, and had deserted her almost at the very altar."

Again that horrible gasp broke from Doris's lips, and was unnoticed. Doris tried to speak, to cry out, but the words died away in her throat. The room, the green trees outside the window, and the face of the old nurse, seemed whirling around her; and through it all, as if shrieked out, trumpet-tongued, upon the still air, she could hear every word that was uttered.

"Then, in a flash—*that which Mr. Frederick had tried so hard all in vain to recall when he recovered from his dangerous illness, came back to him.* And it struck him dumb with horror.

"It was quite true. He had married the lovely young girl, bringing her to Baltimore on their wedding trip; and stepping out to get a cigar, the terrible accident had occurred which laid him up for long weeks in the hospital. And, oh, the pity of it! Think of it!—picture it! When he had recovered, it was with a strange blank in his mind. He had

forgotten the existence of the fair young bride he had brought to Baltimore—forgot his marriage and all connected with it. And it was all the more pitiful, because it had been a secret one. Even his relatives knew nothing of it.

"Before he could find voice, in his horror, grief and amazement, to explain this to the young bride who believed herself so cruelly deserted, and had tracked him down, finding him about to wed another, she had fled, and—"

The rest of the sentence never was finished. With the wildest cry that ever was heard, Doris sprang from the couch, and sank down in a dead faint at the old nurse's feet. In an instant she had raised the slim, girlish figure in her strong arms, and laid her on the couch again.

"Dear me! who would have thought the story would have affected her so!" she muttered, brushing back the lovely, clinging golden curls from the marble white face. "I only meant to draw her thoughts away from her own troubles. I am afraid this will give the poor child a terrible back-set."

She lost no time in administering restoratives, and soon the lovely blue eyes flared open, and they rested on the old nurse's face; there was a gleam so strangely bright in them that Mrs. Linwood, the old nurse, was quite frightened.

With a great sob Doris struggled up to a sitting posture and caught eagerly at the old nurse's hands.

"Was it a dream?" she cried, incoherently. "Tell me—was it a dream?"

"Was what a dream, my dear?" asked the old nurse, in a puzzled wonder, looking in affright at the girl's flushed face.

"That it was *fate* that separated Frederick and me!" gasped Doris. "That he did not mean to desert me so heartlessly! Oh, there has been a most horrible mistake—a mistake that has wrecked two lives!" she cried out, incoherently.

"Listen, nurse," she cried, vehemently. "I am that most unhappy bride who wedded Frederick Thornton secretly and came with him to Baltimore, and who had every reason to believe that he had willfully deserted me."

"*You!*" cried the old nurse in the greatest amazement.

"Yes, I," repeated Doris, sobbing as though her heart would break. "It must have been the han of fate that led me to you, nurse, and prompted you to reveal to me Frederick Thornton's story. And oh! the joy of knowing he never meant to be false to me! Oh, nurse, nurse, those words have made me well!"

Mrs. Linwood almost believed it as she looked

at the girl's beautiful flushed face, and her eyes bright as stars.

Long and earnestly the old nurse and Doris talked the matter over; and Doris told her all of her pitiful story from beginning to end.

"Now that you know all, nurse," she sobbed faintly, "what would you advise me to do?"

Oh, how eagerly, wistfully the lovely blue eyes scanned the wrinkled face of the old nurse who had saved Frederick's life.

Mrs. Linwood took the little, white, trembling hands in her own, and smiled down into the eager, lovely young face.

"There is but one thing to say, my dear," she answered, slowly, "and that is—to go back to your husband."

Doris drew back with a sudden blush.

"Nay, nay; do not let false modesty stand between you now," she counseled. "You are his lawfully wedded wife; and a wife's place is by her husband's side."

"Oh, nurse, if you would but send for Frederick to come to me, telling him all," sobbed Doris, hiding her lovely face on the white, ruffled pillow.

"I know a better way," declared Mrs. Linwood. "As soon as you are strong enough to stand the little journey I will take you to him. He is now at Thornton Villa," she answered.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DORIS GOES TO FREDERICK'S HOME.

It has often been said that "Love works wonders." This was especially true in Doris's case. From that moment her rapid convalesence was most wonderful. In a week's time she was able to undertake the short journey to Thornton Villa.

"How strange it seems—going back to my—my—husband, after being so strangely parted from him three long years ago;" said Doris, clinging to her companion's arm, half laughing half sobbing, as the coach rolled swiftly along the sunlit streets, then struck into the shady road that led out into the suburbs.

Oh, how joyously the birds warbled, looking at the lovely face in the carriage that whirled by with their bright little eyes, as much as to say: "We know where you are going; we hope you will have a royal welcome." Even the flowers seemed to nod

gaily to Doris from the roadside as she passed them.

"Every mile brings me nearer to my love," murmured Doris, as she counted the mile-stones.

And yet, when the great turrets and towers of Thornton Villa loomed up in the distance before her, she grasped her companion's arm with nervous dread.

"I am coming to Frederick's home uninvited," she breathed, softly. "I wonder if his mother and sisters will be glad or sorry when they see me!"

Then she remembered under what widely different auspices she had crossed that threshold before. She blushed to remember it—in disguise, and as his mother's paid companion. *Now* her fortunes were strangely reversed. She was heiress to a million now; a courted, petted society belle—a different personage, indeed, from the little nobody, the poor little dependent whom Mrs. Thornton would have considered no match for her handsome, elegant son.

"Of course they will be glad to see you, my dear," declared the old nurse, warmly. "They know but too well how Mr. Frederick has mourned and grieved after you."

Trembling with excitement, she still clung to the

old nurse's arm as the carriage swept up the long curved drive to the porch.

Mrs. Thornton and her three daughters, Isabel, Gwendolin and Trixy, were seated in the drawing-room engaged in quite a spirited discussion at that particular moment.

And it had all been brought about by a letter Gwendolin held in her hand. It was from Vivian Carsdale, and read in the postscript that she intended paying them a flying visit some time during the following week—"and had something wonderful to tell them—that is, if you have not learned all about it from Frederick ere this," she added.

And it was as to what this wonderful news could be they were just then discussing.

"I hope my brother has not married that artful Vivian at last," cried Trixy, "and I am almost sure it is that; for did not Frederick write us himself nearly six weeks ago, these identical words—'he had something wonderful to tell us, when he came home'?"

"I used to think so much of Vivian, three years ago," sighed Mrs. Thornton. "It was the one desire of my life to see her Frederick's wife—and now I am only too thankful that they drifted asunder."

"Perhaps the artful young widow has accom-

plished that which the young girl failed to do—caught Frederick in her toils after all," said Isabel.

"What if it should be about Gerald Marston, the old lover whom Vivian threw over for Frederick three years ago, would you care, Gwendolin?" asked Trixy, looking roguishly at her sister.

"She could say nothing about him that could affect me," said Gwendolin Thornton, proudly.

"She might say that she had met him again, and at sight of her dark eyes the old flame of love has been relighted in his breast, and he has laid his heart and fortune at her feet a second time."

"I should not believe it," returned Gwendolin, quietly. "All love for Vivian died out of Gerald's heart long ago. He told me so only the last time he called. Oh, mamma," she cried, turning her blushing face toward her mother "shall I tell Isabel and Trixy what else he said?" she stammered, hiding her rosy face in her handkerchief.

"I will tell them for you, my dear. They may as well know first as last" smiled Mrs. Thornton. "Gerald asked your sister Gwendolin to become his wife, my dears."

There was a perfect shower of ohs! and ahs! from two pairs of lips; and in a trice, Isabel and Trixy were by their sister's side, covering her blushing face with kisses, declaring the lovers had

stolen a march on them. They had not even suspected such a tender state of affairs.

"Then it really must be our poor brother Frederick whom Vivian has caught in her toils," declared Trixy, despairingly.

"He does not write much like a happy lover," said Isabel, languidly. "There is certainly a tone of despondency runing through his letters."

"Ah, mamma, you have almost forgotten to-day is Thursday," said Trixy. "You know Frederick is coming here to-day."

"How could I forget that, my dear?" smiled Mrs. Thornton. "I am counting the hours until he arrives. He will not be here until seven. It is only three now, my dear," consulting her jeweled watch.

"I hear carriage wheels now, mamma," declared Trixy, springing to the bay-window, from whence she had a very good view of the spiral drive that led to the front porch. "Yes, I see a carriage. The coachman is opening the door. It is not Frederick, mamma. Two ladies are alighting."

"Callers," commented Mrs. Thornton, settling herself down in her chair and awaiting the inevitable.

"Why, bless me, if it isn't old Nurse Linwood!" cried Trixy, from her post of observation. "And

there is a beautiful young lady with her, mamma; a young and very lovely lady, elegantly dressed."

Mrs. Thornton raised her eyebrows in well-bred surprise, but made no comment.

A moment later there was the sound of voices in the corridor without. Nurse Linwood and the butler, who had never been on good terms, were having a little altercation outside.

"No, ma'am, no; I cannot allow you and this lady to pass on to the drawing-room without being announced. My lady would be very angry, indeed!"

"But I *will* pass on without being announced!" declared Nurse Linwood, emphatically. "Mrs. Thornton will never consider it presumption on my part, be sure of that."

"Orders are orders, Mrs. Linwood," answered the man, sturdily. "All the ladies of the family are in the drawing-room, and perhaps they might not like to be intruded upon by your forcing your way into their presence. I ask you again to wait here until I see whether they will see you and this young woman or not."

"Fiddlesticks!" snapped Nurse Linwood. "Stand out of the way, I say."

"Do let the man announce us, nurse," whispered Doris. "I would far rather do it than raise a

scene;" but old Nurse Linwood was not to be shaken from her resolve.

"See what is the matter, Trixy, my love," said Mrs. Thornton, knitting her brows into a dark frown. "I cannot understand what those loud voices can mean. If Nurse Linwood is out there, bid her to come in, by all means. Ah, Trixy, I can never repay the debt of gratitude I owe her. Her great care of him saved my darling boy's life."

Trixy flew to the door and flung it open.

"Oh, it is you, is it, Nurse Linwood?" she called. "Come right into the drawing-room."

"Well, who has come out best *now* in the argument?" said the old nurse to the butler, as she drew Doris triumphantly past him.

But he was not to be outdone in this manner.

"Mrs. Linwood—and—a lady!" he announced, boldly, with a flourish of his hand.

A moment later the old nurse and her charge had gained the threshold of the drawing-room.

Instinctively Mrs. Thornton and the young ladies had risen to their feet at the entrance of the graceful, veiled stranger Mrs. Linwood held by the hand.

The next instant Doris had thrown up her veil. After three long years Frederick's mother and Doris stood face to face—at last!

For one instant a death-like silence reigned. Then

Mrs. Thornton took a step forward, scanning breathlessly the lovely young face before her.

"Who are you?" she cried. "Your face is strangely familiar—and—yet—it is not!"

The answer nearly took her breath away. Doris came and knelt before her, bowing her lovely golden head as she replied:

"I am your son's wife! *I am Doris!*"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AT LAST.

There had not been so much rejoicing at Thornton Villa for years as there was during the hour that followed Doris's return.

It seemed a wonderful story to Mrs. Thornton and her daughters, that the famous beauty and heiress of whom they had heard so much, was indeed Doris—Frederick's bride.

"Oh, if you had but made a confidant of me and told me all, how different everything would have been," cried Trixy, laughing and crying in a breath as she threw her arms around Doris's neck, giving her a real old-fashioned, girlish hug.

"You are here just in time for Gwendolin's marriage," Trixy went on eagerly; "and a very brilliant idea has occurred to me in connection with it. We will have a double marriage. You shall be married over again to Frederick, and that will be your real wedding day. I will not hear a word on the subject in the way of objection," declared Trixy. "I must have my way about this.

"You will have barely time to rest an hour before luncheon," Trixy went on, gayly. "Remember who is coming at seven. And when he finds his darling Doris is here—beneath this roof—he will not wait an instant until he sees you. These lovers are always impatient creatures. Great goodness! how you are blushing, Doris. But there! I must run away.

"Oh, dear! every one's love affair turns out happy but mine," murmured Trixy, with a little, half-suppressed sob. "Gwendolin and her lover are to marry. Doris and Frederick are to be happy at last. While Karl Lancaster, the young man I care for—Oh, dear, what a little goose I am for caring for a young man who does not dream of caring for me. But he does not know it and never shall. There's a great deal of consolation in that."

It was a very happy six o'clock dinner they sat down to; but Doris could not eat a morsel. But no

one pretended to notice it. She was glad to escape to her room. She quite fancied they must hear the tumultuous throbbings of her heart as the hands of the ebony and bronze clock on the mantel traveled slowly—very slowly—toward the hour of seven.

Suddenly there was a quick, imperative tap on the door, accompanied by Trixy's shrill voice, crying out, impatiently:

"Open the door, Doris, please. I have something for you."

Doris opened the door all in a flutter. Had Frederick come, and was Trixy bringing a message from him? But, no. There stood Trixy, with a pretty white mull dress, half smothered in lace flounces and knots of blue ribbon, on her arm.

"I'm going to convert you, in no time at all, into a veritable Cinderella, my dear Doris," she cried. "As your trunks are not here yet, you must accept the loan of one of my dresses for this once. I want you to look ever so pretty in 'somebody's' eyes. And I know that somebody will think you perfectly charming in this."

"Oh, how good you are, dear," said Doris, happy tears shining in her blue eyes.

"Don't mention it, or you will confuse me," declared Trixy, laconically. "Come now, Doris.

You haven't much time to spare, I can tell you. See, it wants a quarter to seven now."

Then the work of transformation began. Doris was soon robed in the pretty white mull dress, and the pale blue sash knotted about the slender waist, with a cluster of blue bells, as blue as her eyes, on her breast.

"There never was such a little fairy," Trixy declared, leading her up to the mirror. "True, you have not any diamonds on—and I haven't any to loan you; but who would miss such trifles, gazing at such a bewitching, blushing face, and eyes bright as stars? Oh, won't every young fellow around here envy Frederick, though!"

"Please don't, Beatrix," cried Doris, blushing redder than ever. "I'm so happy, and you are trying to make me vain."

At that moment the sound of carriage wheels was was heard rolling up the avenue.

"It's Frederick—at last!" cried Trixy, waltzing out of the room, but calling back with a saucy little roguish laugh: "Expect to be called very hurriedly in five minutes time."

And away she flew to allow Doris to recover her composure; but that was easier said than done. How her face flushed and paled as she heard that well-remembered voice in the corridor below—

heard the tender, cheerful greeting that passed between him and the family. Then she knew, by the faint sound of their voices, they had taken Frederick into the drawing-room.

How long would it be before they would send for her?

At the thought a sudden, girlish hesitancy crept over her, and she felt like running away from Thornton Villa again.

She went swiftly down the corridor into the conservatory, but the perfume of the rare exotics seemed to stifle her, and she passed into the garden.

How long she stood by the fountain she never knew, but a few minutes seemed to elapse; then she heard Trixy calling her name; but she did not move—did not stir. All power to move or to speak seemed suddenly to have left her, she was so agitated. Then there was a confused murmur of voices.

Trixy had burst into the drawing-room with a white, startled face, declaring Doris *had gone*.

A low cry fell from Frederick's lips, but before he could utter a word his mother put her jeweled hand on his shoulder.

"I do not think there is any need for agitation, my dear boy," she said. "You must go into the conservatory and search for Doris, and take

my word for it, you will find her; if not there, she will probably be in the rose-garden beyond, waiting for you."

Frederick Thornton needed no second bidding; in a flash he had gone from the room, and was hurrying toward the conservatory. He stood in the midst of the nodding blooms, glancing around him with eager, impatient scrutiny, calling, softly, "Doris! Doris!" But no slight form pushed aside the green leaves and sprang into his outstretched arms.

"She is not here," he said to himself.

Then he went on into the rose-garden beyond.

The dusk had crept on, the golden stars had come out, and a young moon was set like a jewel in the night sky, shedding a soft, subdued light on the flowers and trees.

He saw the glimmer of a white dress through the branches of the lilacs. The flush deepened on his handsome face. Some one was standing by the fountain—he knew it must be Doris.

She was leaning over the fountain's brim, watching the stars that were reflected in the rippling water, and thinking of Frederick—wondering how she would greet him—what words she would use. She longed for, yet, girl-like, half dreaded the all-mportant moment when it drew nigh. Down the

lawn strode a tall figure, his heart in his eyes, as he watched the beautiful picture under the blossoming boughs. He crossed over to where she stood, coming up behind her, his footsteps making no sound on the thick, green grass.

He bent over her so closely that his lips almost touched her golden curls.

Doris was looking dreamily over the roses, wondering why the moonlight falling upon them at that moment seemed to take a more golden hue; why the robins, singing their good-night songs in the branches of the beeches, seemed so joyous as they twittered and hopped from branch to branch; and why her heart commenced to beat with a rapture so keen it was almost pain.

Some subtle magnet caused her to turn her head —and then she saw him.

Frederick Thornton was standing close beside her with extended arms, and a light on his handsome face that thrilled her to the heart's core.

"Doris, my darling!" he whispered, with tremulous eagerness.

With a little quivering cry, she murmured:

"Frederick! oh, Frederick!" and the next instant his arms enfolded her, just as they would hold her through life, pressed close to his throbbing heart, and love's passionate kisses were burning the fair,

sweet face, the rosy mouth and rippling golden curls.

"You know all, Frederick? My terrible mistake?" she faltered.

"Yes, all, my darling," he answered, taking her white hands and clasping them round his neck and firmly folding them there. "It was a terrible, yet a very natural mistake, which any one would have made under the circumstances. We have been near being severed for life, my darling; but thank Heaven, the past—is past. Yesterday at this time I thought I had lost you forever, Doris, and life looked dark and not worth living; for what is life worth unless shared by the one we love."

His handsome mustached lips drooped lower until they rested against the rosy, dimpled cheek.

"I am going to claim the little bride whom fate drifted so strangely from my arms on our bridal day as soon as possible," he declared. "We both know how dangerous are delays. I shall claim you this very hour. You will consent if you love me, Doris. Tell me—do you, Doris?"

A rosy flush surged from Doris's dainty white throat to her broad white brow for one little second, as she struggled to free herself once more from the strong clasp of those loving arms; and she shyly lifted those wondrous blue-bells of eyes to his

face, with a glance so full of adoring love that it almost took his breath away for rapturous ecstasy, and he was answered.

Then followed for the re-united lovers half an hour in paradise, as they sat together on the garden bench among the roses, talking over the past and exchanging eager vows of constancy and love for the future.

"Oh, Frederick, we might have been happy long ago, if I had not thought you loved—Vivian, your first love, better than me," she murmured; "and I remembered, too, that you had wedded me on that fateful night of the ball, through pity's sake," she added, smiling.

"Pity is akin to love, dear," he answered, tenderly. "It is not always the love kindled at first sight that lasts longest, dear.

"I confess, when I married you, it is as you say—I did not love you, Doris. Shall I tell you when I *did* commence to care for you, dear?"

"Yes, tell me, Frederick," she whispered.

"It was on that weird bridal trip of ours, while we were on the train whirling toward Baltimore. You sat by the window, with your pretty face turned toward the outer darkness, looking so hopeless, so forlorn and friendless that my heart smote me for not trying to make you happier.

"Then, again, the full knowledge of my love for you burst upon my heart on the night you stood under these very same beech trees and confessed your love for the husband whom you supposed had cruelly deserted you, crying out you loved me, but would die to set me free that I might marry Vivian. On that night, when I thought I had lost you forever, I knew the bitterest pangs of torture a man's heart can know. But we will talk of the dark past no more, love. The dark clouds have rolled away, and, thank Heaven, the sunshine of love has illumined our lives at last.

"Come, dear, we will go into the house. They are sure to be tired of waiting for us."

"I should think they were tired of waiting for you," cried a saucy voice behind them.

It was Trixy, who had come up just in time to hear that last remark.

"They haven't the patience of Job, please understand; and they've waited so long for you two that patience has long since ceased to be a virtue. Mamma has sent for you both. There will be plenty of time for this billing and cooing in the future."

They followed Beatrix, laughingly, into the drawing-room, where the whole family was gathered to receive them.

The girls would not hear to it that Frederick

should claim his bride at once. It would be so romantic to do the wooing all over again, and have it end in a grand wedding. Besides, that course, and that course only, would prevent the startling story of the past from being given to the world, and causing a nine-days' sensation, they declared.

And, for the latter reason, impatient as he was to claim Doris, Frederick was forced to admit that plan was best.

That afternoon a telegram was sent to the Lancasters, informing them that Doris was at Thornton Villa.

"Of course, I am very glad to think Doris and Frederick Thornton are to be happy at last," said Mrs. Lancaster that night to her husband. "But, oh! how sorry I am for our Karl! Doris has wrecked his life! He loved her so well! He—he—told me so," she sobbed.

"He is young; time will cure all that. His heart is very susceptible. The next pretty girl he meets is quite liable to catch his heart in the rebound."

"How can you imagine Karl so fickle as that?" cried his mother, warmly.

"It is not fickleness; it is the way of men; human nature, my dear."

The next afternoon the Lancasters, accompanied by Karl, presented themselves at Thornton Villa.

Doris flew to the door to welcome them, her face all smiles and blushes. They could scarcely recognize in the gay, happy girl who conducted them into the drawing-room the dreamy-eyed, pensive Doris who had always shrunk in such abhorrence from lovers, and the subject of love.

When Trixy heard that Karl Lancaster was coming that afternoon, any one might have guessed her secret, she blushed so hotly to the very roots of her bronze curly head. Doris noticed it at once. She noticed, too, how very particular Beatrix was over her dress that afternoon.

Even Karl Lancaster was bewildered by the lovely vision of girlish loveliness that danced into the drawing-room to greet him that afternoon, extending the prettiest mite of a little white, slim hand.

"Why, I declare, Trixy! how you do change!" cried Karl, flushing a little under the fire of the girl's bright, sparkling eyes.

"In what way?" asked Trixy, with a toss of her curls.

"You seem more beautiful each time I see you," he declared, honestly. "Indeed, you do, Trixy."

He expected some kind of a saucy reply or witty remark, but Trixy answered never a word; praise from him was bewildering to her. Karl was startled

at the swift change that came over the girl's lovely face.

"I hope you are not angry with me for saying that, Trixy," he added, earnestly. "I meant no flattery, upon my honor. We are such old friends, you know, that I may surely be pardoned for saying just what I think."

Trixy laughed, but somehow the laughter seemed slightly forced.

"Your mother promised me that you would show me the new clove carnations in the garden. Shall we go and look at them now?" he asked, eager to change the subject, and Trixy agreed at once.

How pretty Trixy looked as she moved among the glowing roses, Karl told himself. Strange that he had never known how pretty she was before.

"I am glad you are here, Karl, that I may say in person that which I was just about to write to you to-day," said Trixy, looking up at him suddenly.

"What is that?" he asked, drawing nearer to her.

"I should like you to be 'best man' at Doris's and Gwendolin's wedding," she said. "I am to be first bridesmaid, and am to choose the best man. I should like it to be you, Karl, if you are willing."

"Do you think me more eligible than any other of your numerous acquaintances that you would

confer such an honor upon me?" he asked, lightly, banteringly.

"Yes," she answered, seriously.

And again he saw that strange look cross her face, and her eyes fell before his searching gaze.

A strange sensation thrilled his heart. A sudden thought flashed through his brain. *Trixy cared for him!* Surely, it could not be egotistical fancy. The thought brought with it great pleasure.

He was young and impulsive, and, as his father had said, his heart was on the rebound.

He took a step nearer Trixy, and on the impulse of the moment whispered softly, as he caught her little white hand:

"Don't you think I could fill a better position at that wedding than a 'best man,' Trixy?"

"Why there is no better position, unless you were one of the two bridegrooms," she declared.

"Why couldn't there be *three* bridegrooms?" he asked, coolly.

"I'm sure I don't know," stammered Trixy, wishing meanwhile that she were back in the drawing-room with the rest of the family.

"I think I could fill the position of bridegroom much better, making it a triple wedding, if I could but find a bride," he persisted. "Do you think I could find one, Trixy?"

"Perhaps you might find some girl foolish enough to have you," she replied, blushing furiously as she turned away from the audacious young fellow, and attempted to fly past him over the lawn; but he held her hands fast.

"Would you be willing to try the experiment, Trixy?" he replied; "it might not be so very foolish."

Half an hour afterward, when the lovers re-entered the drawing room, Doris knew by the happy light on their faces that Karl had found consolation at last.

She crossed over to Frederick's side and laid her little white hand on his arm.

"Do you see how happy Trixy is?" she murmured. "I am afraid we are soon to lose her, Frederick."

"If by losing her I shall gain so noble a young man as Karl for a brother-in-law, I would be quite content. There was a time when I felt quite bitter towards him, Doris, and that was in those old days when I looked upon him as my rival in love's warfare. He was madly in love with my Doris then, and I half fear is so still. I hope he may not wish to marry poor Trixy through pique," he added, anxiously.

"Oh, Frederick, you must not think that," cried

Doris. "Karl is too noble for that, I—I—refused his love twice," she whispered, dropping her sweet blushing face; "and the last time, knowing his love was all in vain, he promised me that he would try his best to forget me. Nothing but a deep, reverential, brotherly love remains in his heart for me now."

"I am very glad to think that," said Frederick, so heartily that Doris could not help but laugh.

"Are congratulations in order?" whispered Doris to Karl, as she bade him good-night.

"Yes," he answered; "I know you will wish me all happiness, Doris. I have won for my promised bride the dearest and sweetest girl in the whole wide world, present company excepted," he added, gallantly.

"I am glad for your sake, Karl," smiled Doris. "Is it to be a triple wedding?"

"If you are all agreed," he replied.

"Of course, we will all be agreed upon that question," said Doris, heartily; "you know that, Karl."

Mrs. Lancaster could find no fault with her son's choice. True, the one desire of her heart was that he should marry Doris, but seeing that was out of the question, she was quite willing to receive dark-eyed Beatrix as a daughter.

The marriages were set for a month from that

day, Frederick declaring that he would not wait twenty-four hours longer, and that he had waited too long already to claim lovely Doris.

Gwendolin's and Trixy's lovers were equally anxious that the marriages should take place as soon as possible.

The long-looked-for day arrived at last, and a sunnier, brighter day could never have been wished for.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WEDDING JOY BELLS.

Preparations for the weddings had been going on at Thornton Villa on a grand scale for over a fortnight past, and on this eventful morning the house and the grounds presented a veritable fairy-land appearance.

The grounds were a bewildering mass of glowing roses; the fountains, with their tinted waters, sparkled like rainbows in the sun; wherever the eye turned it was greeted by banks of delicate blooms.

Long ere the sun had set the guests began to

arrive, and a gayer, merrier throng never made the grim old walls of Thornton Villa echo with their laughter. One by one the marriages were solemnized. First, Gwendolin and Gerald Marston's, then Beatrix and Karl's, then, last of all, Doris and Frederick took their places beneath the great horse shoe of white lilies, and the words were spoken which gave Frederick, for the second time, sweet Doris for his bride.

The congratulations and the grand collation were over at last, and the carriages rolled up to the door to bear the brides and happy grooms away; and as the carriages whirled down the avenue again they were followed by showers of rice and slippers and the best of wishes of the merry throng that remained at the villa, keeping up the joy and mirth with dancing and revelry far into the "wee sma' hours."

"My darling—my bride—mine—*at last!*" whispered Frederick, as he found himself alone with Doris. "Now, from this hour, love, shall our real honeymoon begin," he declared. "I will devote the remainder of my life to make you as happy as a little queen."

They had taken passage on the *Servia* for Europe, and among the first names of the passengers booked they read Vivian's name.

There was an angry exclamation of annoyance on Frederick's face as he came back to their state-room and told Doris this.

Two white arms stole round his neck, and a lovely, dimpled cheek was pressed close to his.

"Do not feel hard against Vivian, Frederick, dear," she said, smiling. "Heaven made her our good angel from the very first. If you had not imagined yourself in love with Vivian, and come up to Madame Delmar's seminary, that eventful day, to see about taking her to that ball, I should never have met you, dear."

"Why, I declare, that's so!" he said. "I never thought of that, I'm sure."

"And if it had not been for Vivian's coming to Newport, and discovering my identity, I should never have been so desperate as to write that letter to you revealing the truth that I was Doris, whom you mourned as dead."

"By George!—pray pardon the expression—but that's true, too, Doris. After all, we do owe a great deal to Vivian."

Great was Vivian's consternation to find that Frederick and his bride were on the same steamer with her, but with the natural polish society gives to the woman of the world she smothered her chagrin, and stepped forward, greeting Doris

gracefully. She had been a little fearful lest Doris might give her the cut direct, but she risked it, and was more than surprised at Doris's sweet, cordial manner toward her.

"You took me at my word that night at Newport, Doris," she said. "I declare to you I never meant one half I said."

"Do not let that trouble you, Vivian," answered Doris, with a grateful smile. "It proved the blessing of my life. It re-united me with—my husband."

Vivian murmured and smiled and turned away, for she saw Frederick approaching, and she could not bear to witness the little tendernesses that would pass between Doris and her adoring husband.

"My plotting and planning to keep them apart from first to last has all been in vain," she muttered. "Heaven's will was stronger than the will of woman. It seems they were intended for each other."

And standing lonely and alone on the deck, the words of the poet occurred to her. Ah! how true they were—how true!

"Two shall be born the whole wide world apart,
And speak in different tongues, and have no thought
Each of the other's being, and no heed;
And these o'er unknown seas to unknown lands
Shall cross, escaping wreck, defying death;

And all unconsciously shape every act
And bend each wandering step to this one end—
That one day, out of darkness, they shall meet
And read life's meaning in each other's eyes."

Vivian avoided them as much as possible on that trip going over, but that, too, was quite a blessing in disguise. What need had a happy bride and groom for the presence of a third party to interrupt their tender love-making?

When the steamer landed on the other side they lost sight of Vivian. Not long afterward they read of her marriage to a duke. The society papers often spoke of her after that—of her dresses, her diamonds, and her cold, proud beauty. She gained for herself the title of "the beautiful icicle." By that they knew Vivian was not happy. And in truth she was not—she had not married for love.

Two years Doris and Frederick spent abroad, and at the end of that time, as Doris declared, Frederick was more of a lover than ever.

One sunny morning saw them on board the steamer, bound for "home sweet home."

They spent a week at Thornton Villa, then went on to the charming home that had been prepared for them by Frederick's forethought at Cornwall-on-the-Hudson. And there they now live—the happiest couple the sun ever shone on.

One of the kindest and noblest acts Doris ever did was, when she heard one day of Madame Delmar's pecuniary troubles, to send her a check for an amount which covered her indebtedness. A letter accompanied it, telling Madame Delmar all.

The check fell from madame's trembling hands to the floor, and her face turned from red to white as she read the letter through, then passed it to her brother John.

"If there was ever a case of 'heaping coals of fire' on one's head, here it is," cried madame, with a burst of tears. "I am glad she bears no ill will towards me."

"There are few young girls who would have forgiven you for the way you treated little Doris, and she has repaid you, like the angel she is," said John Delmar, huskily.

"Who ever thought in those days that Doris was destined for a great lady?" she said, slowly.

"Treat every one kindly, and you will never come amiss," replied John. "Are you intending to accept the check?"

"I suppose I must," sobbed madame; "but I shall try to repay Doris some day."

Ten years have passed since then; but it does not seem to have added a day to Doris's appearance, except to expand the girl into a most gloriously

beautiful woman. She is the same Doris as of yore, only her eyes are a deeper blue, the sweet mouth a little more resolute, and her hair has taken on a deeper and more golden sheen, and is done up now in a coil more becoming to a wife than the fluffy, golden curls waving about the pretty, dimpled face when we first introduced her to our readers as a school-girl.

Mrs. Thornton loves Frederick's wife quite as dearly as her own daughters, all of whom are married now, and are living around her.

Madame Delmar still keeps the seminary at Beech Grove for young ladies and misses, and there is a room set apart for little lads as well as little lassies. One summer morning a lovely child of, perhaps some eight years stands on the seminary steps, with a roguish pout on her saucy, red lips, because she has been kept in half of the recess to do her lessons.

If you ask her what her name is she will raise two lovely blue-bells of eyes, and shake back her sunny curls as she answers:

"Papa calls me 'pet' and 'little sunshine,' but my mamma calls me 'Doris Vivian Thornton.' Do you see that little boy over yonder, with the wide sailor collar and dark curls? Well, that is my little

brother Karl. He is named after my aunt Trixy's husband."

Sunshine and shadows cross every household more or less; but, taken all in all, it would be difficult to find a happier family than that of Doris and Frederick.

What is there to add when those whom we have followed through trials and adversity reach the acme of earthly happiness at last?

Re-united after many days, heart to heart and soul to soul, we will leave them, dear reader, these two who were so cruelly parted, almost at the altar.

"Oh, love, if life should be
Merely the golden key
To love more vast;
If there should be a place
Where spirits can embrace,
And kisses last."

THE END.

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